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## **Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal past on the Bundian Way**

Jodie Stewart

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**Pathways into History:  
Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal past on the Bundian Way**

Jodie Stewart

Supervisors:

Associate Professor Georgine Clarsen and Professor Bronwyn Carlson.

This thesis is presented as part of the requirement for the conferral of the degree:  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Training Program scholarship

University of Wollongong,  
School of Humanities and Social Inquiry  
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## **Abstract**

The Bundian Way Project is an initiative of the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) who are revitalising an Aboriginal pathway that stretches from Bilgalera (Fisheries Beach), south of Eden on the New South Wales far south coast to Targangal (Mount Kosciuszko), in the Australian high country. The project seeks to celebrate and highlight a deep Aboriginal past, as well as recuperate Aboriginal cultural practices and knowledge systems that helped to sustain people and place for several millennia. Aboriginal Elders and activists engaged with the project hope to share histories that communicate the shared Aboriginal use of the pathway and how post-invasion Aboriginal people guided settler peoples along their ancestral trails. As a 'shared history' pathway, the Bundian Way has been viewed as a mechanism for reconciliation and as a way of building more productive cross-cultural relations. This thesis is an exploration of Aboriginal history-making undertaken by Elders and activists engaged with the project. In particular, this thesis seeks to understand how a small group of non-Aboriginal people are responding to this history-making and what these responses might mean to the process of 'reconciliation' on the far south coast.

This thesis employs qualitative interviews and ethnographic research to consider the many ways that the contemporary Aboriginal past is thought about and utilised via engagements with the Bundian Way project. Elders and activists engaged with the project are drawing on embodied and emplaced practices, and their lived experience as Aboriginal people in settler Australia to (re)imagine histories that can evoke more hopeful futures. Drawing on their words, I argue that their history-making is present-centred and future-orientated and is helping them and their community to build better lives in settler Australia. Non-Indigenous people are thinking about the histories communicated to them by Aboriginal people in various ways; through the body, material and emplaced practices and through specific affects. I argue that these ways of knowing

(re)produce particular understandings of Aboriginal and settler pasts. I also argue that these understandings are often informed by settler emotions, which can impact on the development of productive cross-cultural relations through the project.

Through the Bundian Way ‘shared history’ pathway, Aboriginal Elders and activists are telling more honest histories of the far south coast that foreground the deep Aboriginal past and assert the fundamental difference of Indigenous sovereignty. This process of history-making is challenging some non-Indigenous people to think differently about Aboriginal and settler pasts. This thesis examines how this unfolding process, initiated by Elders and activists on the far south coast, is received, interpreted and utilised by some non-Aboriginal people in the place they call home.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Elders and activists who shared their knowledge and insights with me. This project would not have been possible without their generosity. I want to thank BJ and Ossie Cruse, Aileen Blackburn, Darren Mongta, and Warren Foster. Thank you for inviting me into your communities and for helping me understand better the places that we inhabit.

Profuse thanks also go to Les Kosez, who was my main point of contact at the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council. Your workload was immense, but you always made room and time for me and provided ongoing support and encouragement. I can't thank you enough. Likewise, Eden LALC CEO Penny Stewart – thank you for always making me welcome.

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Thank you to the young Aboriginal men and women who took time out of their day to speak with me. You introduced me to a world I will never experience but will always endeavour to better understand.

Thank you Meaghan Holt for helping to facilitate my research with schools. Your help and support was invaluable.

To all my non-Indigenous participants, I thank you. I am immensely grateful for your honesty and generosity.

Bundian Way project manager, Noel Whitem's, ongoing support was also pivotal to my research. Thank you, Noel, for always taking the time to meet with me and answer my questions.

In the early days of my research, I reached out to several scholars for advice and counsel. Thank Anna Clark, Denis Byrne, Michael Adams, Michael Organ, Peter Ricketson, and Mark McKenna for providing me with invaluable academic guidance and support.

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Thank you to my professional editor, Ruth McHugh who, with patience and humility, worked under very tight deadlines. Thank you to my colleagues at the University of Wollongong, Bega campus. Thank you for your ongoing encouragement but most of all for letting me talk, sometimes incessantly, about this thesis! In particular, I want to thank Chris Brennan-Horley for all your help and support over the many years we sat together in the UOW, Bega research office.

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And to my family - Paul and my daughters' Teah and Ava. When we started this academic journey together almost 5 years ago, I think we all thought that this day would never come. It is here, and I hope that I made you all proud.

## **Certification**

*I, Jodie Louise Stewart declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.*

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***Jodie Louise Stewart***

*31 August, 2019*

## Declaration

Chapters in this thesis draw on publications produced during this candidature.

### Publications

1. Jodie Stewart, 'History By Doing: Reclaiming Indigenous Women's Sovereignty through Embodied History', *Lilith Feminist Journal* 25 (Nov 2019).
2. Jodie Stewart, 'Cross-cultural encounters: reconceptualising shared histories on the Bundian Way', *Postcolonial Studies Journal* 23, no.1 (2019): 116-131



## Maps.

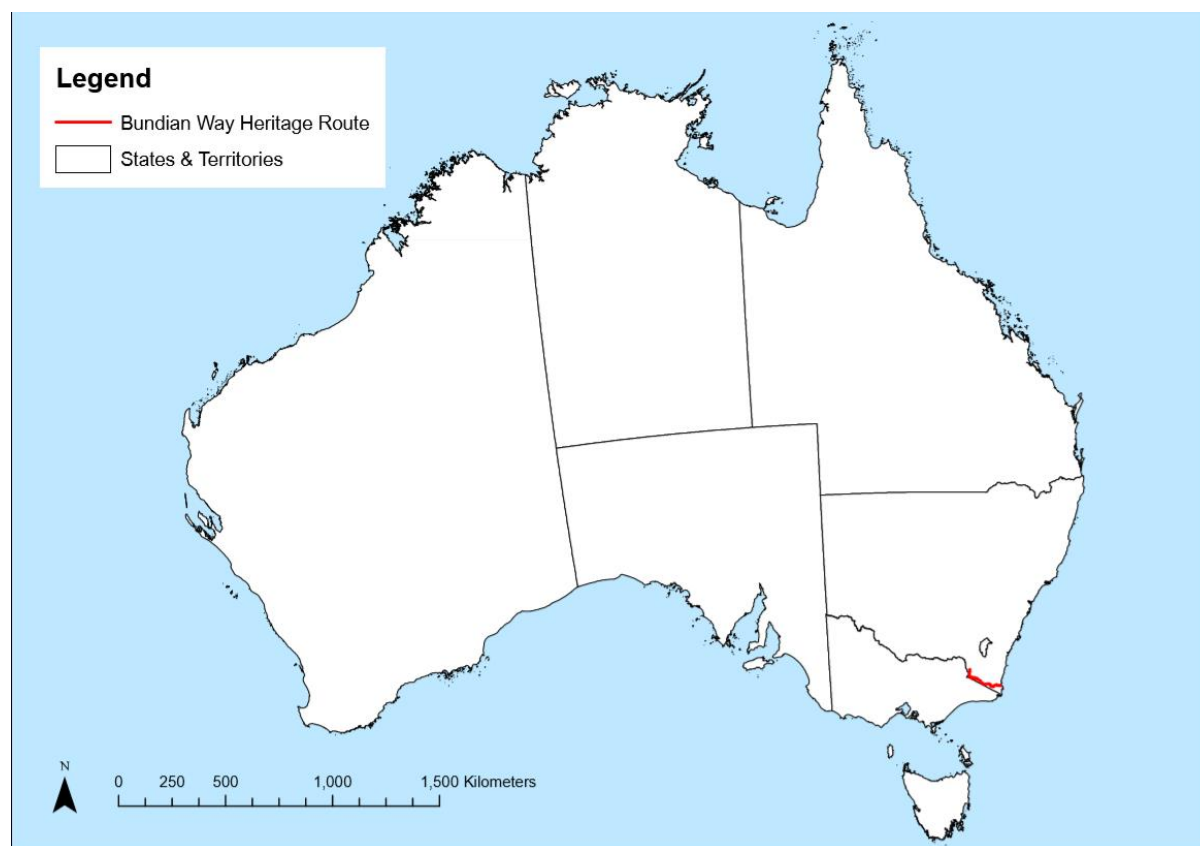


Figure I: *The Bundian Way Heritage Route: courtesy of Shannon Brennan, Local Land Services, NSW.*

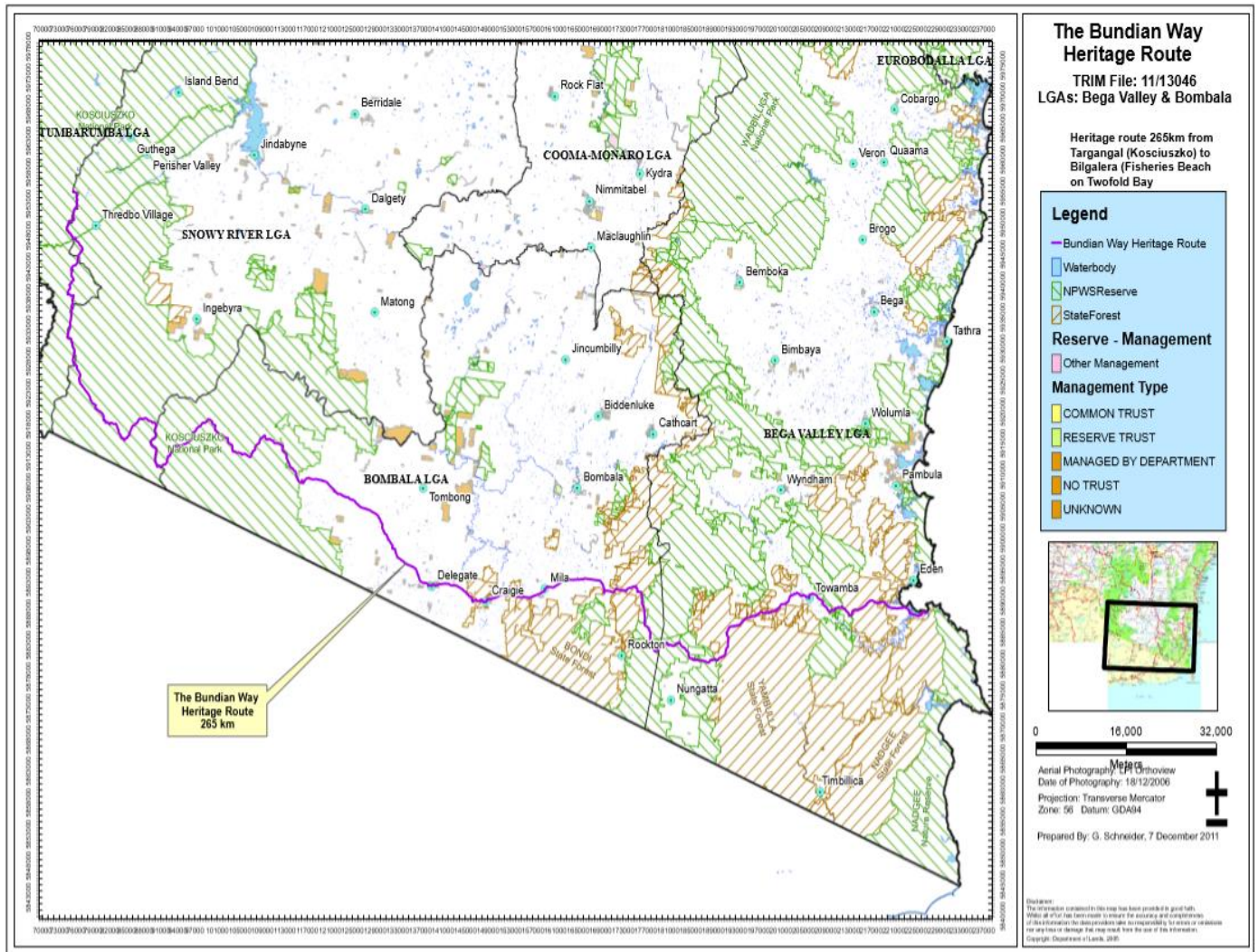


Figure II: The Bundian Way Heritage Route. Photo: courtesy of the Eden Aboriginal Land Council.



Figure 111: *Study Area*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>CERTIFICATION .....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>DECLARATION.....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>MAPS.....</b>	<b>VIII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>XIV</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THINKING ABOUT THE BUNDIAN WAY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
1.1 Thinking about History .....	19
1.2 Thinking about Aboriginal Pasts. ....	31
1.3 Thinking about Place and Bodies. ....	39
1.4 Thinking about Recuperation.....	43
<b>CHAPTER 2: RESEARCHING THE BUNDIAN WAY .....</b>	<b>49</b>
2.1 How? .....	52
2.2 Why?.....	66
2.3 Who? .....	70
2.4 Conclusion .....	78
<b>CHAPTER 3: FROM FISHERIES TO BILGALERA.....</b>	<b>81</b>
3.1 Beginnings: Places, Practices, Pasts .....	85
3.2 Beginnings: Becoming Bilgalera.....	92
3.3 Conclusion .....	95

<b>CHAPTER 4: ENCOUNTERS ON THE BUNDIAN WAY .....</b>	<b>98</b>
4.1 Critical Histories and New Possibilities .....	102
4.2 The Contemporary Aboriginal Past.....	107
4.3 Telling Aboriginal and Settler Histories on the Bundian Way: Experience, Expectation, Hope. ....	116
<b>CHAPTER 5: ‘DOING’ HISTORY ON THE BUNDIAN WAY .....</b>	<b>125</b>
5.1 Understanding Indigenous Women’s Historical Practice .....	131
5.2 The ‘Yams have brought us together’: Belonging, History, Pasts.....	137
5.3 ‘Getting down and dirty’: History-work and ‘Women’s Work’ .....	141
5.4 Webs of Connections: Places and their Pasts .....	150
5.5 Conclusion .....	153
<b>CHAPTER 6: ‘FEELING’ THE BUNDIAN WAY .....</b>	<b>156</b>
6.1 History-work as Emotional Work .....	158
6.2 Feeling the Settler and Aboriginal Past .....	163
6.3 Loss and Settler Identity: Situating an Ethics of Care .....	183
<b>CHAPTER 7: ‘SHARING’ THE BUNDIAN WAY .....</b>	<b>191</b>
7.1 Telling Indigenous Stories on the Far South Coast .....	196
7.2 Shared Places and Living in Indigenous Sovereignty .....	208
7.3 Sharing Spaces and Navigating Contemporary Indigenous Life Worlds .....	217
7.4 ‘Reconciling’ Our ‘Shared History’: What Does Sharing Look Like? .....	219
7.5 Conclusion .....	227
<b>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>248</b>

<b>APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH APPROVALS AND CONSENT. ....</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW, FOCUS GROUPS AND SURVEY QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>270</b>
<b>APPENDIX 3: FACEBOOK POSTS .....</b>	<b>273</b>

## List of Figures

FIGURE I: THE BUNDIAN WAY HERITAGE ROUTE.....	VIII
FIGURE II: THE BUNDIAN WAY HERITAGE ROUTE. PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE EDEN ABORIGINAL LAND COUNCIL.....	IX
FIGURE III: SIGN ANNOUNCING THE QUARANTINE BAY ENTRANCE OF THE BUNDIAN WAY STORY. 1 TRAIL, EDEN, NEW SOUTH WALES.....	1
FIGURE 1.1: WILLIAM ‘BILL’ KOELLNER, C1950.....	4
FIGURE 3.1: FISHERIES BEACH, EDEN NSW.....	81
FIGURE 4.1: YOUNG ABORIGINAL MEN WORKING ON THE BUNGO CREEK BRIDGE, PART OF THE BUNDIAN WAY ‘STORY TRAIL’ .....	117
FIGURE 5.2: AERIAL VIEW OF JIGAMY FARM .....	137
FIGURE 6.1: TOUR GUIDE, LES KOSEZ, EXPLAINED THE INDIGENOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF TWOFOLD BAY ON THE UOW, BUNDIAN WAY 202012 TOUR.....	166
FIGURE 6.2: INDIGENOUS GUIDE WALKS TOUR ATTENDEES ALONG THE BUNDIAN WAY ‘STORY TRAIL’. APRIL 4, 2016.....	171
FIGURE 6.3: VIEW FROM ‘BRIERLY LOOKOUT’, BUNDIAN WAY ‘STORY TRAIL’.....	198
FIGURE 6. 4: VIEW FROM ‘BUDGINBRO LOOKOUT’, BUNDIAN WAY ‘STORY TRAIL’. .....	200
FIGURE 7.1: A CREEK AT NUNGATTA NEAR BOMBALA THAT CONTAINS EVIDENCE OF SHARED USE BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS PEOPLE. ....	210
FIGURE 7.2: AN INDIGENOUS ARTWORK AT EDEN MARINE HIGH DEPICTING RECONCILIATION. NOVEMBER 4, 2015. ....	219
FIGURE 7.3: VIEW FROM THE ‘WHALE DREAMING TRAIL’, EDEN NSW.....	229





Figure III: *Sign announcing the Quarantine Bay entrance of the Bundian Way Story Trail, Eden, New South Wales.*



## Introduction

‘People making history is where they reveal themselves’.<sup>1</sup>

I never gave much thought to the heavy varnished artefacts that hung on the wall of my childhood home. For years they hung there, beside the polished brass peacocks and just to the left of the macramé utensil holder my sister had made in her year nine woodwork class. They became part of the furniture, silent witness to the ebb and flow of our family’s domestic life. I never really thought to ask where they came from. When I grew up in Bega in the 1980s, Aboriginal culture was everywhere and nowhere. This was not dissimilar to the rest of the country. Brightly decorated boomerangs often took pride of place on a family’s mantelpiece next to the framed photo of a much-loved relative; and miniature boomerangs hung from the ears of young women. Aboriginal iconography became part of the kitsch of 1980s pop culture in Australia as Aboriginal dot art sat beside the colourful flourishes of Ken Done. In 1980s Bega, my family’s artefacts blended seamlessly with other treasures, complementing the bric-a-brac of a 1980s suburban aesthetic.

Even though I spent many hours in that living room with the Aboriginal objects hanging on the wall above me, I never thought about the Aboriginal man who made them. Who spent hours burning decorative scars into the wood? Who carefully varnished them and gifted them to my mother? For me they were the mounted representation of Aboriginal Australia that was as distant from me as the ‘foreign country’ of my nation’s past. But of course, at some level I knew. I knew a little of my own family history; that my great-grandfather and grandfather

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

had employed Aboriginal people to pick beans on their property, and that my mother grew up being loved and cared for by these same Aboriginal employees. Sadly, this knowing was fragmented and incomplete, with the death of my grandfather and then my mother, and with my grandmother's memories slipping from her. That Aboriginal past that was inexplicably tied to mine was by the early noughties reduced to a few scattered memories and anecdotes.

My mum, Carol Stewart (nee Koellner), was just a girl when she received these objects. My dad told me that the Aboriginal made who made them wanted my mum to have them. This man had worked for my maternal great-grandfather, Charles 'Charlie' Koellner and my grandfather, William 'Bill' Koellner picking beans on their property in Tarraganda from the 1940s through to the early 50s. This was before mechanisation of the bean and pea industry when the fertile river flats of the Bega Valley produced significant yields for white farmers, farmers like my great-grandfather and grandfather, who not only profited from the original seizure of Aboriginal land but from the regular, seasonal labour of Aboriginal people to bring in the crops.<sup>2</sup> My Nan's memories of Hugo Noble are few. She could not tell me where he came from, or if he had any family but she could recall his Monday morning routine. He would wake her at 6am, after starting a fire to boil the laundry copper, and remind her that it was washing day. When I talked to Wadi Elder, Aunty Barbara Nicholson in the winter of 2014 about Hugo Noble's spears, boondis, boomerangs and woomeras he carefully crafted she told me that they should be returned to country. I knew in my heart that she was right. When I talked to Pastor and south coast Elder Ossie Cruse about the collection of weapons,

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<sup>2</sup> John White argues that the decline of the pea and bean picking industry on the south coast of NSW can be attributed to two factors: the mechanisation of the industry and the political agency of Aboriginal people which led to greater employment opportunities. See John White, 'Peas, beans and riverbanks: seasonal picking and dependence in the Tuross Valley', in *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, eds. Ian Keen (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 122.

his eyes lit up, ‘You know, I was there one day with your grandfather when Uncle Hughie was making a boomerang. Your grandfather was saying ‘you’ll never get that thing to fly’, and you know what? Uncle Hughie threw that boomerang and in a great arc it came right back to him’.<sup>3</sup> Ossie also tells me about the relationship that he and my grandfather shared, ‘your grandad was one of my best friends’, he said.<sup>4</sup> This made me feel immensely proud.



*Figure 1.1: William ‘Bill’ Koellner, c1950*

I was twelve months into my PhD researching the Bundian Way project when Ossie Cruse shared these stories about Uncle Hughie and my grandfather with me. Ossie Cruse had spent

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<sup>3</sup> Ossie Cruse, personal communication, July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

many years picking beans and peas up and down the south coast and he had also spent time in the employ of William ‘Bill’ Koellner, my maternal grandfather. When I enrolled in my PhD with the desire to document the development of the Bundian Way project, I was unaware that my own family’s history was intimately tied to Ossie Cruse; the project’s leader and the Eden Aboriginal community’s most well-respected patriarch. As a settler descendant who can lay claim to white early ‘pioneering families’ in Bega and across the Monaro, I should have realised that in investigating a local Aboriginal history project I was likely to dredge up remnants of my family’s past alongside broader community memories and histories. But oddly, when I began, I did not consider that this would be the case. I imagined myself as a researcher with an academic purpose, not as a community member with a history.

Ossie Cruse’s story situates my family and me within the broader narrative of Aboriginal and settler relations on the far south coast. My story is woven into the fabric of people and events that have shaped the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community in the place that I call home. My story is one of the many that has shaped the development of the Bundian Way project. My past is no longer a ‘foreign country’. Ossie Cruse’s memories of Uncle Hughie, my grandfather, and of the friendship that he and my grandfather shared, have revealed intimacies that have drawn me closer to a community that I once knew little about.

\*\*\*\*\*

I started this thesis in my childhood home because this is the place where I first learned how to know Aboriginal and settler pasts. When I commenced my academic studies in history at the University of Wollongong’s Bega campus in 2007, my world shifted on its axis. With new intellectual tools, I learned how to question my deeply-held assumptions about the world I inhabited. After several years of academic study, which included an honours year and PhD candidature, I no longer thought or felt the same. My long-held beliefs began to wobble.

Many conversations with Ossie Cruse in the course of this research have prompted me further to think hard about how I came to know Aboriginal and settler pasts. Our conversations over the last four years have prompted me to consider how Aboriginal and settler pasts overlap and become entangled. As a way of knowing the Aboriginal and settler pasts, my family's history and the stories told about it, have played a significant role in informing my relationship with the Indigenous community. I have been forced to ask; what role has history-making played within this messy space?

While I had acquired skills in academic history, such family history-making and my broader historical consciousness was informed by the social and cultural world in which I grew up. I was not the only one who learnt to remember and forget Aboriginal people.<sup>5</sup> On the far south coast, Aboriginal people often did not appear in the region's official and unofficial histories or in the minds and historical consciousness of the peoples who invaded and settled here. As Mark McKenna reported in 2002, most people who reside on the far south coast have 'no idea of the indigenous societies that inhabited the land before their own brief tenure began'.<sup>6</sup> Yet in 2014, in the year that I enrolled in my PhD, and with Bundian Way project developments being promoted by Elders and activists and celebrated in the local media, that mood appeared to be shifting.

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<sup>5</sup> Chris Healy argues that in settler colonial Australia a process of remembering and forgetting Aboriginal people has resulted in Aboriginal people 'disappearing' from the national consciousness. See Chris Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008). Settler Colonial Studies scholar the late Tracey Banivanua Mar argued similarly that the remembering and forgetting Aboriginal people is not 'simple absent-mindedness but an active process where the full picture of the past is repressed'. See Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Settler-colonial Landscapes and Narratives of Possession' in *Stolen Land and Broken Cultures: The Settler-colonial Present* (Carlton: Arena Publications, 2012), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfella's Point: An Aboriginal History of Place* (Sydney: UNSW press, 2002), 15 -16.

The Bundian Way stretches from Targangal (Mt Kosciusko), Australia's highest mountain peak, to Bilgaleria (Fisheries Beach), a small beach tucked away in the south-east corner of Tullemullerer (Twofold Bay), south of Eden on the far south coast of New South Wales.<sup>7</sup> The pathway traverses diverse geographical and cultural landscapes from the coastal hinterlands of the south coast to the wind-swept plains of the Monaro tablelands to the snow and ice country of the Snowy Mountains. The Bundian Way was a shared route utilised by Aboriginal people from different tribal groups. It was part of a wider network of Indigenous pathways that criss-crossed the south-east and brought Indigenous people together for trade, ceremony, to arrange marriages, exchange information and for socialising.<sup>8</sup> The movement of Aboriginal people along an intricate network of pathways shaped the landscape, providing tangible evidence of Indigenous cultural and social life pre-invasion.<sup>9</sup> Knowledge of pathways was communicated via ceremonies and song and was passed from one generation to the next.<sup>10</sup> On the far south coast, the Bundian Way is etched into the landscape and is also held within the intergenerational memory of present Indigenous people.

In 2014 when I began this research, the Bundian Way project was in its early developmental stages. Elders and activists engaged with the project sought to revitalise the Bundian Way and open it to tourism and cultural education. In 2012, the Bundian Way was placed on the

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<sup>7</sup> P.G Spooner, M. Friman and Yalmambirra, 'Origins of Travelling Stock Routes. 1. Connections to Indigenous traditional pathway', *Rangelands Journal* 32 (2010): 330.

<sup>8</sup> John Blay, 'Bega Valley Region Old Path Ways and Trails Mapping Project'. Bega Valley Region Aboriginal Heritage Study, 2005. Also see Dale Kerwin, 'Aboriginal Dreaming Tracks or Trading Paths: the common ways', PhD Thesis (Griffith University, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> John Blay and the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, *Report on a survey of the Bundian Way 2010-11*, [http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian\\_Survey\\_Public.pdf](http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian_Survey_Public.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> P.G Spooner, M. Friman and Yalmambirra, 'Origins of Travelling Stock Routes. 1. Connections to Indigenous traditional pathway', 303.

New South Wales State Heritage Register that recognised its significance as a ‘rare surviving ancient pathway that had been used by Aboriginal people for thousands of years’.<sup>11</sup> The listing also recognised the important role the pathway and its Aboriginal custodians played in the early colonisation of the south-east.<sup>12</sup> The listing was made possible by survey-work undertaken in 2010-11 by an Aboriginal survey team who walked the length of the Bundian way over several months finishing in November 2011. A more accessible route was also identified which was named the ‘Touring Route’.<sup>13</sup> This route is closely aligned to the heritage trail and has been proposed as a walking, educational and touring route.<sup>14</sup> The 2010-11 survey team included John Blay, Warren Foster, Darren Mongta, Quentin Aldridge, Derek Davison, David Dixon, Dennis Cruse, Colin Davison, Garry Mongta, BJ Cruse, Brian Mongta, Matthew Mongta, Dennis Arvidson, Lee Cruse, Jolene Brindle, Teneille Stewart, Markita Manton, Brooke Mongta and Muriel May. The survey-work incorporated Aboriginal knowledge and expertise and research undertaken by non-Aboriginal historian John Blay.<sup>15</sup> It mapped not just the pathway’s geographical contours but also its place in both Indigenous and settler histories.

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Bundian Way’, Heritage Places and Items, *NSW Government Office of Environment and Heritage*, <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5060185>

<sup>12</sup> The heritage listing was also documented in the NSW Government Gazette on January 18, 2013. See New South Wales Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Government Gazette of the State of New South Wales*, (January 18, 2013): 121-122. [https://gazette.legislation.nsw.gov.au/so/download.w3p?id=Gaz\\_Gazette%20Split%202013\\_2013-3.pdf](https://gazette.legislation.nsw.gov.au/so/download.w3p?id=Gaz_Gazette%20Split%202013_2013-3.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> John Blay and the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, *Report on a survey of the Bundian Way 2010-11*, [http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian\\_Survey\\_Public.pdf](http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian_Survey_Public.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See Blay, John and the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, *Report on a survey of the Bundian Way 2010-11*, [http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian\\_Survey\\_Public.pdf](http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian_Survey_Public.pdf)

The Bundian Way project is an initiative of the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) and with the assistance of an advisory committee, Elders and activists hope to share the pathway and its history with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as a ‘shared history pathway’.<sup>16</sup> The project is led by senior Yuin Elder and Pastor Ossie Cruse and his son BJ Cruse (who was, at the time, the chairperson of the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council). When I began this research, the LALC had employed a project manager, Noel Whittem to oversee the project. The existing Land and Sea Country Coordinator, Les Kosez, and four Land and Sea country rangers were also heavily involved with the planning and implementation of project infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> Already in 2014, the project was generating rich conversations amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of the far south coast. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation in the far south coast community with many expressing their support for a project that looked to strengthen Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, Indigenous connections to country and culture, and to create an income generating cultural tourism business.

In June 2014, a local woman, Elaine Cozens responded to a post titled ‘Bundian Way preserves and shares Aboriginal culture’,<sup>18</sup> on the ABC South East Face Book page. She wrote, ‘My great grandfather was guided by an Aboriginal man up the Bundian way to

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<sup>16</sup> Bundian Way Advisory Committee, *Bundian Way Master Plan 2014-2017: An Eden Aboriginal Land Council Tourism Project*, (2014): <http://www.bundianway.com.au/Master%20Plan%20Bundian%20Way%20project>.

<sup>17</sup> The Eden LALC hope to develop the pathway through staged work on four identified nodes: Jigamy-Eden-Bilgalera, Bilgalera to the Yam-fields, Yam-fields-Delegate-Wilderness lodge, Kosciusko. See *Bundian Way Master Plan 2014-2017: An Eden Aboriginal Land Council Tourism Project*, 19-25.

<sup>18</sup> See, Bill Brown, ‘Bundian Way preserves and shares Aboriginal culture’, *ABC South East NSW*, July 4, 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/02/4017106.htm>



Delegate to marry my great grandmother...in the mid-1800s'.<sup>19</sup> This comment, and many others, prompted me to think carefully about Indigenous history-making on the far south coast and the narratives and conversations that they generated among non-Indigenous, settler residents, like Elaine Cozens. For her, to know the settler and Aboriginal past was to be intimately connected to it. Like mine, Elaine Cozens' family history was tied to the Bundian Way and its shared history. What could these connections and ways of articulating the settler and Aboriginal past, expressed by non-Indigenous residents, tell me about settler ways of knowing Indigenous pasts?

Early responses to the Bundian Way project by non-Indigenous community members led me to consider the impacts of Indigenous history-making on the far south coast. The responses of a small group of non-Indigenous people in my community to the history-making of Indigenous people engaged with the Bundian Way project is the focus of this thesis. The ways in which histories are made and maintained and what they can reveal about the nature of Aboriginal and settler relations in this small far south coast community lies at its heart. For this research I spoke with a small group of non-Indigenous people who resided on the far south coast and the Monaro and who were actively engaged with the Bundian Way project. I also consider myself a part of this group and have positioned my own family history-making and research practice as one of the many ways that the Aboriginal past on the Bundian Way can be understood. I discuss my research methods in greater detail in Chapter 2.

The non-Indigenous people that I interviewed for this research were all active supporters of the Bundian Way project, and of Indigenous causes more broadly. They are what cultural

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<sup>19</sup> See appendix 3.

studies scholar, Lisa Slater, would call ‘good white people’; ‘left-leaning settler people who want to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and social issues’.<sup>20</sup> My non-Indigenous participants and I actively sought out opportunities to participate in Bundian Way events and activities and many expressed the desire to engage with Aboriginal people in more meaningful and ethical ways. As settlers of good will we were also seeking out opportunities to ‘know’ more about Aboriginal pasts in ways that would transcend our own noisy and dominant pasts. Like Slater, I understand that the term ‘good white people’ is a somewhat ‘crude’ description of a diverse peoples. Not all progressive white Australians share the same histories, values or experiences. In the context of my research, terms like this can elide the diversity of experience, ideas and histories that exists among residents of the far south coast. However, the term ‘good white person’ works well to characterise the non-Indigenous people that I interviewed who would all consider themselves allied with the social and economic justice aims of the Bundian Way project. I address the complexities of this identity and how it informs this research in more detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

To better understand the impacts of Indigenous history-making among non-Indigenous people in my community, I also spoke with Indigenous Elders and activists engaged with the project at the time. Non-Indigenous people of ‘good will’ were responding to a form of Indigenous history-making produced, disseminated and performed by Indigenous Elders and activists on the far south coast. The ‘shared history’ focus of the project and the unique ways that Elders and activists defined ‘shared history’ also influenced the ways in which settlers of good will responded to the project, and to Aboriginal pasts more generally. Non-Indigenous

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<sup>20</sup> Lisa Slater, *Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism: Australia, Race and Place* (New York, Routledge: 2018), ix.

settler history is often the reference point for local histories of the far south coast and the Monaro. You don't have to look far to find monuments to the settler past; War memorials populate nearly every town and village and local genealogical and historical societies house archives that overflow with the material and ephemeral traces of 'white' pioneering history. A group of Indigenous Elders and activists on the far south coast were, through the Bundian Way project, facilitating a process of history-making that placed their own experiences and the experiences of their past, present and future community at its centre. The prominence of this history-making presented a challenge to the settler project of remembering and forgetting Aboriginal people on the far south coast.

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The chapter structure of this thesis reflects the themes that emerged throughout my research project as well as the range of people I spoke with. In Chapter 1, I discuss my theoretical framing. I outline the scholarship that has informed my thinking and helped me to better understand what I was seeing, hearing and feeling as I conducted my research. In Chapter 2, I discuss my research journey, paying particular attention to the ways in which my research and the decisions I made about it as a non-Indigenous 'good white person' produced particular understandings of Aboriginal and settler pasts. I consider how academic research is a particular type of response to Aboriginal pasts by unpacking the 'whys, hows and whos' of historical research undertaken in settler colonial contexts. In Chapter 3, I begin my exploration of non-Indigenous responses to Aboriginal pasts by considering the experiences of five non-Indigenous people who returned annually to camp at Bilgalera, a significant site on the Bundian Way. This place is of deep historical and cultural significance to Aboriginal people. The deep Aboriginal past and its importance to Aboriginal people are not apparent to many non-Indigenous people who remember the campsite fondly as Fisheries. In this chapter

I ask: how do non-Indigenous people engage with Aboriginal places when Aboriginal histories of place are not their primary frame of reference. In Chapters 4 and 5, ‘Encountering the Bundian Way’ and ‘Doing History on the Bundian Way’ I explore Aboriginal historical practice—Aboriginal history-making by looking at how history is being produced through the Bundian Way project and how it is communicated by Indigenous Elders and activists engaged with it. Drawing attention to history-making undertaken by young men and women employed through the project, I consider the ways that these young people are renegotiating dominant settler histories and ways of practising history to produce histories that can enable them to live better in settler colonial Australia.

Chapter 6, ‘Feeling the Bundian Way’ examines non-Indigenous responses to Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way. I explore what it means for non-Indigenous people to ‘feel’ Aboriginal and settler pasts by considering the responses of non-Aboriginal visitors to the pathway and those who were actively engaged with the project. While Elders and activists working on the project are proposing alternative modalities for knowing and understanding settler and Aboriginal pasts, early engagements with the Bundian Way project by non-Aboriginal people revealed that emotions like guilt and shame, and feelings of loss and anxiety, cloud settler understanding. For many non-Aboriginal people to ‘know’ the settler and Aboriginal past is also to *feel* deeply about it. I pose questions about the utility of settler emotions and explore how they are being deployed by non-Indigenous people of good will to help them respond to the complexities of Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way.

Chapter 7, ‘Sharing the Bundian Way’ focuses on the notion of ‘shared history’ and how it is understood not only by Elders and activists engaged with the project, but also non-Indigenous people. The notion of ‘shared history’ poses challenges to Indigenous Elders and activists whose understanding of ‘sharing’ often butts up against broader reconciliation narratives that

many non-Indigenous people subscribe to, that emphasise sameness at the expense of cultural difference. I explore the difficulties of ‘shared history’, paying attention to the ways in which non-Indigenous people have navigated the ethical demands of Indigenous-history making that point toward a different idea of ‘sharing’ based on Indigenous sovereignty. My concluding chapter draws the threads of my analysis together and considers broader national engagements with Aboriginal and settler pasts.

Each of the thesis chapters starts with a story or anecdote that was generously shared with me by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who contributed to my research. I do this as a way of honouring the thoughts and opinions of those that contributed but also to foreground the importance of storytelling to the process of history-making that unfolded throughout the project. While storytelling is not the focal point of my research, it was a recurring method used by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to explain their connection to people and place and to share aspects of their history. Storytelling emerged as a way of accessing Aboriginal and settler pasts and as a powerful form of history-making. I want to honour the history-work of those that shared these sometimes deeply intimate stories and anecdotes with me. As Emma Dortins argues, storytelling can enable the intergenerational transmission of histories that matter.<sup>21</sup>

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In May 2017, my dad, my eldest daughter and I travelled to Jigamy Farm, an Indigenous-owned property on the shores of the Pambula Lake, north of Eden. Jigamy Farm also houses the Aboriginal cultural centre, Monaroo Bobberrer Gudu Keeping Place, and the office of the

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<sup>21</sup> Emma Dortins, *The Lives of Stories: Three Aboriginal -Settler Friendships* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2018), 7.

Land Council, and is recognised as the gateway to the Bundian Way. When we arrived Ossie Cruse invited us into the boardroom where we carefully laid out Hugo Noble's artefacts. As he turned the spear thrower (woomera) over in his hands he explained to my dad how the technology worked, he also linked this sophisticated technology to the Bundian Way project and its aims. 'That's the beauty of the Bundian Way project', he said, 'they will see that we weren't barbarians'. Prior to our visit with Ossie Cruse, my dad had expressed reservations about parting with the artefacts that had hung in our family home. For my dad, these objects bound him to my mother and her history. His face lit up when he spoke with me about my mother and her relationship with Hugo Noble. 'I think he knew that she would look after them', he said about the artefacts. When my mum and dad moved from our childhood home in Bega to dad's childhood home in south Pambula, he housed these artefacts we once considered purely decorative, in his shed, wrapped in an old sheet to protect them against dust and marauding insects. There they waited, and fifteen years after my mum's death, these material objects re-emerged to take on new meanings.

For dad, my mum's belongings became an extension of her. Her clothes still hung in the cupboard, her running shoes stayed stacked neatly in the shoe cupboard beside the bed they shared; her perfume remained on the dressing table. Like the clothes and perfumes that reminded my dad every day of my mother, Hugo Noble's artefacts told a particular story about my mother. At the Monaroo Bobberer Gudu Keeping Place these artefacts could tell a different story. This did not necessarily erase the story of my mother or diminish its significance. For dad, these artefacts will always be imbued with her memory. To me, these artefacts represented an entangled and complicated past that transcended my, and my mother's lives while it also encircled them. As we stood with Ossie Cruse in the boardroom of the LALC with the objects laid out on the boardroom table a different narrative emerged, and my mother's material history was irrevocably altered.

If 'people making history is where they reveal themselves', then non-Indigenous responses to settler and Aboriginal pasts has much to tell us about who we are. It can give us a space to consider the many ways that history-making brings our worlds into being and give us pause to consider how these worlds overlap and become entangled. For non-Indigenous, settler people, the process of making history can tell us much about our identity as inheritors of the settler colonial project. It can also help us to determine what we might like to become.

## Chapter 1: Thinking about the Bundian Way

When we came into this land in 1842

When we came into this land we didn't have a clue

Then they showed us the water, they showed us their land, they showed us their trail, they took us by the hand.

Because that's the Bundian Way, the Bundian Way.

When you came into this land, you didn't have a clue

Because you didn't know what to do

You didn't know what to eat

So, we showed you our yams

So, we showed you the track, and took you by the hand

Because that's the Bundian Way, the Bundian Way<sup>22</sup>

The above are song lyrics written by Bundian Way project manager Noel Whitem. He wrote the song in parts, as a work in progress. Noel Whitem started in 2015 with the first verse and chorus that featured the story of European settlers being guided by Indigenous people in the

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<sup>22</sup> Warren Foster and Noel Whitem, *The Bundian Way*, Eden: Grow the Music/South East Arts, 2017.



early years on settlement. The second verse was added in 2017 by Djiringanj man Warren Foster. In the early days of the project's development, Noel Whitten performed the song at local high schools, at Bundian Way events, and other occasions where he was asked to speak about the project. In 2017, Warren Foster joined him in a local studio to record the extended version of the song.

For Noel Whitem, song was a way of thinking about and communicating Aboriginal and settler pasts on the Bundian Way. The song tells a particular story of Aboriginal and settler relations along the pathway, of a benevolent, self-assured and sovereign people selflessly helping ignorant, hapless settlers. The song expresses a key theme, that of Indigenous generosity, which runs through almost all of the interviews I conducted with Indigenous Elders and activists as part of this PhD project. Song was one way to convey this prominent theme. Doctoral research is also another way of telling a story that, like the song Noel Whitem sang, works to produce particular understandings of the world.

This chapter addresses the ways that I, a non-Indigenous historian who has always lived on the far south coast of NSW, have chosen to tell the story of the project's development. Here I look specifically at the conceptual framing that I have employed to help me understand what I was seeing, hearing and feeling over the four years that I undertook my research. I address the scholarly literature that has helped inform my thinking and also the insights of Elders and activists who collaborated with me on this research. This chapter unfolds in four interconnected parts that loosely resemble my thought processes as I attempted to navigate the complexities of history-making on the Bundian Way: 'thinking about history', 'thinking about places and bodies', 'thinking about Aboriginal pasts', and 'thinking about recuperation'. I begin by addressing the scholarship on history-making outside of the academy, then explore theories of the body and place and how they pertain to historical

practice. I then narrow my focus to consider Indigenous Elder and activist BJ Cruse's notion of 'contemporary peoples' and how it informs the history-making practices I observed on the Bundian Way. I finish with an exploration of history's importance to the Bundian Way project as a reconciliation pathway.

I do not attempt to present a broad-ranging inter-disciplinary study. My approach could be described as 'cross-fertilisation', which Chris Healy and Maria Tumarkin suggest is 'the borrowing and testing of ideas from other contexts to see if they enrich, deepen or altogether transform our understanding'.<sup>23</sup> With this approach, I draw on insights and concepts from a range of disciplines whilst situating my research firmly within the discipline of history. I do so in order to highlight the dynamic and vital history-work undertaken by Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project. A study of Aboriginal history-making in rural and regional Australia also has much to say about the nature of historical thinking and practice within a contemporary Australian settler colonial context.

## **1.1 Thinking about History**

In this thesis I consider the historical practice of Aboriginal Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project and how it impacted on a small group of non-Indigenous people. Central to my thesis is the history-work that Elders and activists perform in order to problematise and (re)negotiate dominant historical understandings of Aboriginal and settler pasts. I borrow the term 'history-work' from heritage scholar Laura-Jane Smith. Smith argues that heritage is more than the past or material objects, rather it is 'a process of engagement,

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<sup>23</sup> Chris Healy and Maria Tumarkin, 'Special Issue: Social Memory and Historical Justice', *Journal of Social History* 44, no.4 (2011):1007.

an act of communication and an act of making meaning in and for the present'.<sup>24</sup> From this standpoint, I consider how history is 'a process of engagement or act of communication', in this case practised outside of the academy, which can offer new and nuanced understanding of the experience of protracted settler colonisation, at a particular time in a particular place.

History performed outside of the academy is variously understood as 'memory', 'collective memory', 'social memory', a 'sense of the past',<sup>25</sup> 'historical consciousness',<sup>26</sup> and even 'past-mindedness'.<sup>27</sup> Senior academic historian Tom Griffith has indicated that for many, history is deeply personal and profoundly communal. In his study of 'the history of peoples' history' he observed that history occurred 'at the dinner table, over the back fence, in the parliament, in the streets, and not just in the tutorial room or at the scholar's desk'.<sup>28</sup> The late Minoru Hokari similarly suggested that history is everywhere and all around us.<sup>29</sup> The Marxist British historian, Raphael Samuel stated that rather than history being the sole purview of the academic historian it was the work of a multitude of hands.<sup>30</sup> Griffith, Samuel and Hokari, among others, have suggested that we consider how histories are made outside

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<sup>24</sup> Laura-Jane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 2012), 15.

<sup>26</sup> Anna Clark, *Private Lives Public History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2016), 3-5.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads: Australians and the Past* (Ultimo: Halstead Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>28</sup> Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 42

<sup>30</sup> Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, 17.

the academy, because these histories matter, and they can tell historians and others much about how past worlds inform contemporary lives.

Over half a decade ago, public historian Martha Sears suggested that, with the exception of Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton's 2010 study *History at the Crossroads: Australians and the Past*<sup>31</sup>, and I would add Anna Clark's 2016 publication *Private Lives Public History*; little attention has been paid in Australia to history-making performed by non-academics, particularly in regional communities.<sup>32</sup> This relative lack of scholarly attention is despite the growth in the public production and consumption of historical texts. As Paula Hamilton and Kate Darian-Smith explain in relation to the 'memory boom' in Australia, the public interest in history and memory now far exceeds the academic study of memory.<sup>33</sup> Certainly the increasing production of local histories over the last several decades, and the relatively good 'health' of local historical societies, demonstrate this trend.<sup>34</sup>

Sears suggests that this lack of scholarly attention is reflected in the rise of the 'nation' as a theoretical frame of reference in the study of Australian history, which she suggests has resulted in the local being perceived as small and parochial.<sup>35</sup> I would also argue that the

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<sup>31</sup> This study has also been replicated in Canada. Both the Australian and Canadian project were based on a land-mark study undertaken in America by American historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan. See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Martha Sear, 'History in Communities', in *Australian History Now*, eds. Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (Sydney: New South publishing, 2013), 202.

<sup>33</sup> Paula Hamilton and Kate Darian-Smith, 'History and Memory in Twenty-First century Australia: a survey of the field', *Memory Studies* 6 (2013):371.

<sup>34</sup> David Carment, 'For their own purpose of identity': Tom Stannage and Australian Local History', *Public History Review* 20 (2013):73-74.

<sup>35</sup> Sears, 'History in Communities', 203.

move toward transnational histories, which explore the interconnectedness of past lives and experiences across national borders, has also resulted in a moving away from local and regional history as a discrete area of investigation and analysis. This is particularly evident when local and community history is seen as being bound up with national myth-making. According to Marilyn Lake the ‘turn’ toward transnational perspectives reflects a strong desire to ‘break free from the straight-jacket of the national story that cuts us off from the world and reduces our history to a small number of favoured national and masculinist narratives’.<sup>36</sup> Certainly recent and past scholarship that has examined community and local historical activity has explored this conceptual problem, yet this scholarship has also acknowledged the importance of the local to understanding the complexities and contradictions of Australian history.<sup>37</sup> For example, Mark McKenna in his Australian history of place, *Looking for Blackfella’s Point* and again in his more recent 2016 publication *From the Edge: Australia’s Lost Histories* noted the importance of looking closely at the history of place and of the politics of a locality to help comprehend broader national history.<sup>38</sup>

In examining the importance of history and history-making to rural Australia Kate Darin-Smith argues that ‘while historians need to continue to conceive of and write new forms of local, and community history, they also need to open up and enter broader debates about the

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<sup>36</sup> Marilyn Lake, ‘Histories Across Borders’, in *Australian History Now*, eds. Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2013), 271.

<sup>37</sup> See Carment ‘for their own purpose of identity’: Tom Stannage and Australian Local History’, 68-79 and Richard Waterhouse, ‘Locating the New Social History: Transnational Historiography and Australian Local History’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 95, no.1 (2009):1-17.

<sup>38</sup> Mark McKenna, *Looking for Black Fella’s Point: An Australian History of Place* (University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 11.

experiences of rural Australia and about history-making itself'.<sup>39</sup> Ashton and Hamilton's three-year study of popular consciousness, *Australians and their Past*, drew attention to history-making activities that have emerged separate from the national context. Their study revealed a trend in historical production that emphasised the private and personal over officially sanctioned and professionally accredited forms of historical knowledge.

Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton in their 2010 publication *History at the Crossroads* highlighted a burgeoning interest in popular history, noting a move away from more formal national narratives. Their research uncovered a disjunction between public engagement with popular expressions of the nation's past and academic history. They reported that many more Australians were likely to visit a museum than read an academic monograph.<sup>40</sup> In the wake of public debates over the nature of historical thinking and practice, Ashton and Hamilton acknowledged a sense of territorialism expressed by some academic historians, whose claims of historical authority butted up against the varied and multiple ways that history was thought about and utilised beyond the academy. Within this contested milieu Ashton and Hamilton had to rework their original research question, 'What is history for' to accommodate 'an increase in the range and diversity of history's use in contemporary society'.<sup>41</sup>

Ashton and Hamilton discovered that people outside of the discipline of history use history for a myriad of reasons. They noted the importance of place, family, locality and material culture as important sites for the production and transmission of historical knowledge.

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<sup>39</sup> Kate Darin-Smith, 'Up the Country: Histories and Communities', *Australian Historical Studies Journal*, 118 (2002):98.

<sup>40</sup> Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, *History at the Crossroads*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Moreover, despite polarising debates over the authorship of the nation's past, Ashton and Hamilton noted the need for families and individuals to take possession of and author their own history.<sup>42</sup> The 'past-mindedness' of Australians was not informed by official accounts or formal education but personal 'funds of knowledge' acquired through more everyday activities like talking with family and watching films and television and from visiting museums.<sup>43</sup> A sense of the past for 'everyday' Australians was often derived from personal and private negotiations with public historical spaces.

Anna Clark, in her 2016 publication *Private Lives, Public History* also set out to broaden understandings of history by moving the spotlight away from academic forms of history-making and instead focus on the ways in which 'ordinary' Australian's engage with and make history. Here Clark acknowledges that in order to undertake such an investigation she needed to think about history as more than 'the sum of its many parts' and instead look to an idea of history that accommodates not only 'what happened' but also the many ways we think about the past.<sup>44</sup> The 'idea of history' that Clark employs is a definition of 'historical consciousness' proffered by German theorist Jorn Rusen who defines historical consciousness as how 'the past is interpreted for the sake of understanding the present and anticipating the future.'<sup>45</sup> Clark's research extends the work of Ashton and Hamilton by

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>44</sup> Anna Clark, *Private Lives, Public History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 4.

looking beyond the disjuncture between academic and popular expressions of the past. She explores a possible intersection between the two.<sup>46</sup>

Much scholarship that addresses the issue of public history in Australia (and internationally) pivots around discussions of historical authority. Paul Ashton addressed this issue recently in his meditation on being a public historian in Australia. Ashton suggests that we need to expand the definition of who is an historian to include the vast historical community as fellow travellers. A select few should not be considered as captains or owners of the past.<sup>47</sup> Sears has similarly commented on the issue of ownership, noting that the widening division between academic history and more popular historical activities may be predicated on the principal position that academic history holds within the wider historical community.

The privileging of academic history has been countered by academic historians themselves, who have asked that the activity of non-academic historians, and (within the context of regional communities), local historians, be considered in light of the social function they serve within their community. As early as 1979, Tom Stannage was advocating for a greater consideration of local history, believing that it would allow Australians to address vital questions about ‘the nature of life and who they were’.<sup>48</sup> In 2013, Martha Sears asked for a fresh engagement with the history, purpose and contribution of community history, in ways

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Ashton, ‘Public History’, in *Australian History Now*, eds. Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2013), 179.

<sup>48</sup> See Carment, “‘For their own purpose of identity’: Tom Stannage and Australian Local History”, 73-74.



that are particular to people, place and time, and to consider how it meets the needs and interest of the communities it serves.<sup>49</sup>

Tom Griffiths' seminal work, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* explored popular history-making from nineteenth-century Australia to the present, focusing on the impact of 'amateur historiography' on the nation's historical and environmental sensibilities. Griffiths' study is a 'history of peoples' history' that, whilst considering how an 'antiquarian imagination' was cultivated in Australia, also examines how particular practices of collecting, preserving and interpreting Australia's material culture reflected the challenges of Australian settlement. That challenge, as Griffith puts it, is dealing with the guilt and anxiety that manifest with 'the knowledge that the land had been—perhaps still was—someone else's'.<sup>50</sup>

Griffiths' influential study was a story of (settler) Australian historical consciousness that sought to explore the influence of European settler sensibilities on a profoundly Aboriginal landscape. Griffiths' study is one amongst many others that addresses the effects of settler European history-making on the national psyche.<sup>51</sup> In a 2014 keynote address delivered at the launch of the collaborative Australian Research Centre at Federation University in Ballarat, Griffiths suggested another way of telling the history of history-making in Australia. He proposed that Australian history start with Indigenous people who have lived here for

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<sup>49</sup> Sears, 'Community History', 211.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>51</sup> For contemporary scholarship on this issue see Mark McKenna, 'The History Anxiety', in *The Cambridge History of Australia Volume 1: Indigenous and Colonial History*, eds. Alison Bashford and Stuart MacIntyre (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 561-580.

thousands of years and have cultivated their own form of historical thinking and practice.<sup>52</sup>

Some scholars have heeded this call by looking closely at Aboriginal history-making and attending to the difference that it makes.

Indigenous people in Australia have a complicated relationship with settler conceptions of history, with many choosing alternative ways to communicate their pasts. This was eloquently expressed by Indigenous author Tony Birch who, in correspondence with historian of subaltern histories Dipesh Chakrabarty, said that he could ‘write my history better as poetry’.<sup>53</sup> As Tony Birch and others have intimated, academic history is not the only way, or even the best way, to tell Indigenous pasts.<sup>54</sup> Indigenous people have millennial practices of history-making different from dominant Hegelian chronologies and formulations of time. These are practices and ways of thinking about the past that do not sit comfortably within the language of academic history in the west. According to Chakrabarty these are pasts that are reduced to the status of ‘inferior’ when set against academic definitions of rationality, of what constitutes facts and evidence.<sup>55</sup> Post-invasion, Aboriginal people have drawn on methodologies from academic history but have continued to emphasise their lived experience and cultural and social practices to represent their pasts in the public domain.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Tom Griffiths, ‘History Under the Southern Cross: Reflections on the Future of Australian History’, An address on the occasion of the Launch of the Collaborative Research Centre in Australian History Federation University Australia (Ballarat, 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘History and the Politics of Recognition’, in *Manifestos for History*, Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Allun Munslow eds. (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 79.

<sup>54</sup> Tony Birch, “‘I could feel it in my body’: War on a history war’, *Transforming Cultures ejournal* 1, no.1 (2006): 19-32. See also John Maynard, ‘Circles in the Sand: an Indigenous Framework of Historical Practice’, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36 (2007): 117 -120.

<sup>55</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Minority Histories, Subalterns Pasts’, *Humanities Research* (Winter 1997): 20-21.

<sup>56</sup> See for example Bruce Pascoe, *Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007) and Judith Wicks, ‘Never Really Heard of it: the certificate of exemption and lost identity,

The rise of Aboriginal histories post-invasion has problematised academic history's claims to truth within newly emerging liberal democracies. But even with the move toward more heterogeneous ways of knowing and understanding the world, academic history still lays claim to a privileged status as purveyor of the past. Late historian of Aboriginal historiography, Minoru Hokari's seminal work, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback*, suggested a way of moving closer to Aboriginal pasts by proposing cross-cultural ways of communicating between disjunctive forms of historical practice. As Hokari states, the process of 'moving closer to Aboriginal pasts' had begun in earnest in the nineties but had failed to reach its destination.<sup>57</sup> Here Hokari identifies the gap between the positivist historical approach and the understanding of Aboriginal community memories that had been rendered 'minor' within the epistemic schema of western academic disciplines. Citing Heather Goodall he draws attention to the work that still needs to be undertaken by scholars in the field. He suggests 'a more sensitive approach to research, which recognises the power and role of a community's own history making'.<sup>58</sup>

For Hokari this meant redefining 'who is an historian?' and reconceptualising historical thinking and practice outside of the parameters of western historicising. As his starting point, Hokari asked 'if, instead of only us academic historians collecting the stories of informants, we were to consider the informants themselves to be historians, what kind of historical practice might they engage in?... By shifting our thinking this way, how might we see history

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in *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*, eds. Peter Read, Frances Peters-Little and Anna Haebich (ANU E Press and Aboriginal History Incorporate, 2008) <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p119111/mobile/ch06.html>

<sup>57</sup> Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian In The Outback* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 247.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

differently?’<sup>59</sup> With this turning over of agency to his Aboriginal informants, Hokari was hoping to expose the limitations of existing methodologies of history and to test whether the discipline of history was ‘serious about promoting the pluralisation of history’.<sup>60</sup> Hokari was advocating for a re-evaluation of historical practice as understood by academic historians who construct and produce history in specific ways. His aim was to draw out and highlight other ways of ‘doing’ history. In Daguragu, where Hokari’s research was centred, history was not being written down in books, although that may also have been occurring. History was nevertheless ‘being maintained’. For the Daruragu community, ‘history is always present...they all participate in maintaining their history... they live their day-to-day lives ...steeped in and surrounded by history as lived experience’.<sup>61</sup>

My concern was not to produce a conventional academic history of the Bundian Way. I was also not interested in eliciting and transcribing stories or histories about the Bundian way from others, although stories and histories were shared with me and with permission, I have reproduced some of them in this thesis. Much work has already been done to document the pathway’s Aboriginal and settler history by Indigenous Elders and activists, and non-Indigenous historians.<sup>62</sup> The history of the Bundian way is held within the intergenerational memory of community members who have kept it alive in various ways: through story, dance, song, art, music, language and through caring for country. The 2010-11 survey work

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>62</sup> See John Blay and the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council, *Report on a survey of the Bundian Way 2010-2011*, [http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian\\_Survey\\_Public.pdf](http://www.bundianway.com.au/Bundian_Survey_Public.pdf), and John Blay *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015).

that was undertaken by the Eden LALC and with the assistance of non-Indigenous historian of the south-east forests John Blay, drew on Aboriginal knowledge and expertise, early settler journals, parish and surveyors' maps and other early colonial documentation to recover and document the pre-contact and shared history of the pathway and to help relocate it within the landscape. In 2005, Blay with the Eden LALC, the Bega LALC and Merrimans LALC for the Bega Valley Regional Aboriginal Heritage Study sought 'to identify and map all major ways of the Bega Valley Shire, find historical background, [and] tap into Koori expertise'.<sup>63</sup> This survey was undertaken to offer an initial study that may provide the impetus for future survey work and incorporated old parish maps and early maps, old journals and logs, early colonial writing, oral histories from non-Indigenous residents and traditional owners, Elders and Aboriginal people, and documentation of Aboriginal artefacts and other material traces found on the ground.<sup>64</sup> Because of this and the 2010-11 survey work, the Aboriginal community have amassed a significant archive that has enabled them to both relocate the pathway 'as a physical presence in the landscape' and to reclaim some of their cultural knowledge, including place names and Aboriginal language.

Aboriginal pathways of the south-east region have also been discussed in several publications, including work by Josephine Flood, Peter Kabaila, Sue Wesson, John Blay and Mark McKenna.<sup>65</sup> Many of these publications share a desire to reinstate Aboriginal people as

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<sup>63</sup> John Blay, 'Bega Valley Region Old Path Ways and Trails Mapping Project', Bega Valley Region Aboriginal Heritage Study (2005), 7. The report was also compiled with the assistance of National Parks and Wildlife and State Forests.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Josephine Flood, *Moth Hunters: Aboriginal Prehistory of the Australian Alps* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1980); Sue Wesson, *An Historical Atlas of Aborigines of eastern Victoria and south-eastern New South Wales* (Melbourne: Monash University, 2000); Peter Kabaila, *High Country Footprints: Aboriginal Pathways and Movement in the High Country of South-Eastern Australia* (Canberra: Prion Publishing, 2005); John Blay, *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way*, (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing,

historical agents by highlighting the importance of pathways to the economic, social and cultural life of Aboriginal communities in pre- and post-invasion Australia. As well as their importance to Aboriginal people, McKenna and Blay discuss the significance of pathways to early Europeans as conduits to pastoral wealth but also as sites of complex intercultural relations. All authors draw on the work of early Europeans, people like artist Oswald Brierly and amateur anthropologist A.W. Howitt who included intimate renderings of their encounters with Aboriginal people in their journals and field notes. Kabaila and Blay also walked much of the landscapes that they described, so adding an experiential element to their analysis. These works are important as they provide relevant insights into the historical and cultural characteristics of Aboriginal pathways in the south-east. They also provide insights into early settler and Aboriginal relations through an imagining of ancient pathways as shared but contested spaces.

## **1.2 Thinking about Aboriginal Pasts.**

Central to my thesis is the notion that a small group of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people of good will are drawing on their pasts in order to better understand the present and envisage more productive futures. These are pasts that are contemporary and present-centred but also look toward the ‘horizon of expectation’ that posits strategies to live well in settler colonial Australia.<sup>66</sup>

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2015); Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas Point: An Australian History of Place* (University of New South Wales Press, 2002).

<sup>66</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 111.

In this thesis I draw on BJ Cruse's foundational evocation that Aboriginal people on the south-east coast are a 'contemporary people'.<sup>67</sup> The Bundian Way is not an almost forgotten relic of a long-distant past. To the contrary, for BJ Cruse and his fellow activists, its utility as a repository of culture, memory and history is very much positioned in the present. They position the pathway as an opportunity to demonstrate and highlight (for their own community as well as for non-Indigenous people) how the community who are its custodians are 'inventing local futures' through a process of history-making.<sup>68</sup> My research is an attempt to 'excavate the contemporary past' of the Bundian Way, while understanding, as archaeologist Dennis Byrne suggests, that the historical entanglement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures means that the 'heritage and archaeology of a place like Australia is always a shared one'.<sup>69</sup> The layering of Aboriginal experience of various accumulated joys, traumas and grievances and the process of historical entanglement with settler peoples and their culture has produced a distinct identity that eschews notions of difference that are policed by settler discourses of the 'authentic Aborigine'. As Byrne notes, 'the sedimentation of this shared history forms part of their distinctive identity... the task of an archaeology of the contemporary past is not to excavate that history but to excavate its present'.<sup>70</sup>

Western notions of time are of particular importance to BJ Cruse and other activists who find that they have to reassert the coevalness of Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives. Set against

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<sup>67</sup> Les Kosez also asked of me, in a rhetorical fashion 'Why is Aboriginal culture the only culture that isn't allowed to evolve?' Les Kosez, personal communication, August 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Dennis Byrne, 'Difference', in *The Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, eds. Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison and Angela Piccini (Oxford University Press, 2013), 302.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

western chronologies, Indigenous people and culture are perceived as existing outside of historical time. Tony Swain argued in his 1993 publication *A Place for Strangers* that the 'looseness of academic language' should claim responsibility for perpetuating stereotypical understandings of Indigenous people as either 'timeless' or never 'on time'.<sup>71</sup> He went on to argue that the designation of western historical consciousness as the 'yard stick' to measure time has resulted in Aboriginal ontology being represented as negative; as being *timeless*.<sup>72</sup> Anthropologist Emma Koval argued in 2015 that time has played a key role in creating and maintaining the Indigenous-modern dichotomy.<sup>73</sup> She also argued that while many anthropologists have moved on from the discourse of otherness, maybe even Swain's 'loose academic language', many non-Indigenous people outside of academia are wedded to the notion of 'anthropological time' or 'allochronism'. Within this formulation Indigenous people are viewed as occupying a different time rather than sharing the contemporary 'space-time'.<sup>74</sup>

The concept of deep time has problematised western time-scales, which marked the beginning of Australian history as an event rooted in western modernity. A deep time approach to the past also provides ways of better understanding place and its human and non-human history. This is particularly important for histories of Australia, which is a continent that lays claim to over 60,000 years of human occupation. As Ann McGrath argues, 'deep

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<sup>71</sup> Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being* (University of Cambridge, 1993), 15.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 15-16. (original emphasis)

<sup>73</sup> Emma Koval, 'Time and Indigeneity and white anti-racism in Australia', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 26 (2015): 95.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 97.



history evokes longer, more meaningful associations with histories of place'.<sup>75</sup> Deep time locates the past in both spatial and temporal dimensions, and in the context of settler colonial Australia, conjures a history beyond European colonisation of the continent. According to Tom Griffiths, deep time approaches to history in Australia offer an opportunity to indigenise history and localise the Australian story.<sup>76</sup> It is also an opportunity to privilege other temporalities and spatial understandings outside of western chronologies and epistemological frameworks.

German theorist Reinhart Koselleck's theory of historical time provides a way of understanding how history-making is undertaken with the past and the future in mind. Koselleck's theorising on historical time was a reaction to a singular version of history, or the idea that history is unified, universal and a progression toward a prescribed aim.<sup>77</sup> In eschewing the linear-cyclical model of time, Koselleck proposed that historical time consists of multiple layers 'that refer to each other in a reciprocal way, without being wholly dependent upon each other'.<sup>78</sup> Koselleck argued that history is the science of experience that unfolds in a singularity but relies on repetition to make experiences meaningful. Embedded within this paradigm is also an expectation, of what is to come. Koselleck postulated that 'experience' and 'expectation' were two necessary categories for adequately thinking about

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<sup>75</sup> Ann McGrath, 'Deep histories in Time, or Crossing the Great Divide?' in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (ANU E Press, 2015), 26.

<sup>76</sup> Tom Griffiths, 'Travelling in Deep Time: La Longue Durée in Australian History', *Australian Humanities Review* 18 (2000), <http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2000/06/01/travelling-in-deep-time-la-longue-duree-in-australian-history/>

<sup>77</sup> Niklas Olsen, 'Reinhart Koselleck. Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories', *The American Historical Review* 124, no. 2 (2019): 613.

<sup>78</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of time. Possible Histories*, trans. and eds. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman (California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 37.

historical time because they embody past and future.<sup>79</sup> Experience and expectation represent a dynamic plurality, as both concepts unfold in the present. Experience is ‘present past’ expressed through the incorporation and remembering of events. Expectation ‘takes place in the today’ as it is ‘the future made present’.<sup>80</sup> Within this formulation, the past, present and future are embodied within the practice of history.

Although Koselleck was not writing about ‘possible histories’ of settler colonisation, his theorising on time provides ways of thinking about history-making within these contexts. Koselleck’s plurality of time might be viewed in the term used by the late historical theoretician Hayden White, as a ‘utilitarian’ idea of history, where pasts are marshalled in the service of the present. According to Hayden White, this is particularly important to settler-colonial nations. White’s notion of a ‘practical past’ as opposed to a ‘historical past’ refers to the ways in which individuals utilise the past in everyday contexts outside of the strictures of what he calls ‘professional history’ and what in this thesis I am calling academic history. White’s notion of a ‘practical past’ supposes that the function of history for those individuals who must navigate an uncertain present, is not what can be ‘known’ about the distant past, but ‘what can we do?’ in order to face an uncertain future. For White the ‘practical past’ is that past:

which we all carry around with us in our daily lives and which we draw on willy-nilly and as best we can, for information, ideas, models, formulas for solving all the practical problems....This practical

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<sup>79</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (MIT Press, 1985), 270.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 271.

past is also the past of repressed memory, dream and desire as much as it is of problem-solving strategy, and tactics of living, both personal and communal.<sup>81</sup>

White explores history's utilitarian function and goes on to propose that 'the practical past' is one that should supersede the 'historical past' because of its ability to function as an ethical discourse. White argues that the 'historical past' is a past fashioned by academic historians. It appears only in the books and articles written by academic historians and has no value or merit as a way of explaining or understanding the present. As he argues 'nobody actually lived or experienced the historical past because it could not have been apprehended on the basis of whatever it was the past agents knew, thought, or imagined about their world during their *present*'.<sup>82</sup> Because of this, White sees that the 'historical past' cannot help us with the ethical question 'what ought I (or we) do?' The 'historical past' cannot offer a way forward because it is premised on a time and place distanced from our own. The most the historical past can tell us is what other people did in a particular time and in a particular place.<sup>83</sup> The question 'what ought/or should I (we) do?', is a question that is fundamental to our human predilection to want to act, to do something. When we are confronted with this question, we respond by drawing on the 'practical past' of memory, dream, fantasy, experience and imagination.<sup>84</sup>

It is White's argument that due to history's scientification in the late nineteenth century it is no longer able to answer ethical questions that are paramount to an individual's and a

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<sup>81</sup> Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 9 (original emphasis).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 10 (original emphasis).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 10.

community's attempt to move forward into a more hopeful future. White sees this form of history making as progressive history which he argues:

is a history that is born of a concern for the future, the future of one's own family, of one's own community, of the human species, of the earth and nature, a history that goes to the past in order to find intimations of resources, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual, that might be useful for dealing with these concerns. (...) We study the past not in order to find out what really happened there or to provide a genealogy of and thereby a legitimacy for the present, but to find out what it takes to face a future we would like to inherit rather than one that we have been forced to endure. (...) progressive historiography would be utopian ... as it uses the past to imagine a future rather than to distract us from facing it.<sup>85</sup>

White's 'practical past' imagines and plans for a more productive and confident future. His is a utopian vision in that it opens up a way of thinking about history outside of and against professional norms and practices that he views as becoming increasingly dogmatic and confined.<sup>86</sup> Within this formulation, modernist fiction and some forms of post-modernist literature replace history as a set of practical presuppositions and are better placed to offer ethical instruction. But the 'practical past' that White proposes is also akin to those everyday practices of 'maintaining history' that Hokari suggests can assist us to forge more productive inter-cultural relations across the gap of western and Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Both the 'practical past' and 'maintaining history' speak to ways of engaging with the past in more ethical ways. They position the ethical imperatives of the present and the future as central to the process of imagining the past.

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<sup>85</sup> Ewa Domanska, 'A Conversation with Hayden White', *Rethinking History* 12, no.1 (2008): 18-19.

<sup>86</sup> Ewa Domanska, 'Hayden White and liberation historiography', *Rethinking History* 19, no.4 (2015): 642.

For the Aboriginal people I spoke to for this research, greater importance is often placed on being able to live with the past in the present, as opposed to the accumulation of knowledge about the past, which is how Western histories are most often conceived.<sup>87</sup> For example, for Aboriginal Elders, activists and employees working on the Bundian Way project, ‘an accumulation of knowledge about the past’ was not enough to explain, negotiate or to understand their experiences as Aboriginal people living in settler colonial Australia. Worimi historian John Maynard has stated that ‘history is crucial across the spectrum of Indigenous understanding, knowledge and well-being’ and that while academic writing has its uses, it is far too confining, with limited ability to enact change in Indigenous communities.<sup>88</sup> This is because academia, and in particular academic histories, are wedded to the ‘Rankean model of enquiry and practice’ that precludes Indigenous ways of knowing.<sup>89</sup> Within this formulation, Indigenous histories are vital to effectively communicating and advocating for change in settler colonial Australia.

These ideas of history are instructive in thinking about history-making by individuals and communities who, in utilising pasts that are contemporary and utilitarian, are activating ‘alternative futures’.<sup>90</sup> In regards to the history-making activities of Aboriginal people in an increasingly globalising world, the focus is no longer on the contact zones of colonial history

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<sup>87</sup> Cultural studies scholar Chris Healy suggest that for Indigenous people an ‘accumulation of knowledge’ about the past is unable to speak to the concerns of the present. He argues for a utilitarian form of history, which he calls social memory, or ‘the myriad of ways in which relationships between the past and the present are performed’ See Chris Healy, *The Ruins of Colonisation: History as Social Memory* (Cambridge University Press: 1997), 5, 7.

<sup>88</sup> John Maynard, ‘Circles in the Sand: an Indigenous Framework of Historical Practice’, *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36 (2007): 119.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>90</sup> Byrne, ‘Difference’, 302.

but on families, kinship ties and community. The Bundian Way project is an example of this emerging phenomenon, of a strategic moving away from the colonial interface indicative of earlier Aboriginal histories, toward histories and historical activities that nourish and support the need among many Aboriginal people to ‘get on with their lives irrespective of the national story’.<sup>91</sup> A focus on useable pasts, on pasts that are contemporary and future-orientated provides ways to position history-making on the Bundian Way as ‘being-in-history’ but also envisaging more productive, ethical and socially just worlds.

### 1.3 Thinking about Place and Bodies.

The Bundian Way is both a site of memory and history and a heritage listed long-distance place.<sup>92</sup> With the instigation of the project, Elders and activists began to invite local people to walk parts of the pathway.<sup>93</sup> Through cultural tours and other events, they invited local people to listen to Indigenous histories in culturally and historically significant places. In this thesis, I have taken the opportunity of this invitation to consider how bodies transmit and accumulate knowledge about the Bundian Way and its pasts. These bodily engagements

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<sup>91</sup> Peter Read, ‘Making Aboriginal History’, in *Australian History Now*, eds. Paul Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (New South Publishing, 2013), 38.

<sup>92</sup> John Blay, ‘Moving Forward: After its listing on the New South Wales Heritage Register, can the 265km Bundian Way bring benefits to the Aboriginal community?’, *Historic Environment* 26, no.1 (2014): 36.

<sup>93</sup> Developing the Bundian Way was part of the 2010, Land and Sea Country Plan. The plan was devised to provide ‘appropriate means for Koori people to access and utilise the land and sea country for cultural and economic purposes’. See the ‘Land and Sea Country Plan: for Aboriginal people with traditional, historical and contemporary connections to land and sea country within the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council region, southeast NSW’ (Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Australian Government: Department of the Environment Water Heritage and the Arts, 2010), v., 59, [https://archive.ils.nsw.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/495519/archive-eden-land-and-sea-country-plan-2010.pdf](https://archive.ils.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/495519/archive-eden-land-and-sea-country-plan-2010.pdf). In 2010, funds were secured through the Indigenous Heritage Program to survey the route. See ‘Bundian Way Master Plan’, 5. BJ Cruse stated that the land council were considering the development of a pathway to connect culture camps along the coast with camps in the Kosciuszko Mountains as a part of negotiations with the State and Commonwealth Government around the 1999 Regional Forest Agreement, BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, September 22, 2015, transcript AE3.

occur in ‘place’, a particular long-distance place that had been largely erased from the landscape and settler consciousness. This place, however, is used by Elders and activists to produce and remember particular understandings of Aboriginal and settler pasts.

According to Hokari, the body is essential to Gurindji historical practice because they feel, hear, see, share, remember and perform history. History can be listened to and felt but also expressed through the body.<sup>94</sup> The late anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose foregrounded the importance of embodied practices to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies when she stated that Aboriginal cultures link time and place in embodied ways. For Aboriginal peoples, place holds an accumulation of memories and histories that are activated by the interconnectedness of ‘ephemeral living beings’.<sup>95</sup> Philosopher and cultural geographer Edward Casey similarly argued from a non-Indigenous perspective that ‘lived bodies belong to places and help to constitute them, and places belong to live bodies and depend on them’; bodies and places interanimate’.<sup>96</sup> In his 2015 monograph, *Memoryscopes*, cultural studies scholar Ross Gibson used the term ‘undeadness’ to discuss the embodied and emplaced ‘experience of remembrance’. Borrowing from the work of Eric Santner he suggested that ‘worldly systems’ are ‘kept significant through cultural determination; a ‘memory-work’ that is ‘lodged in human bodies, but also in places and landscapes.’<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Hokari, *Gurindji Journey*, 93.

<sup>95</sup> Deborah Bird-Rose, ‘Writing Place’, in *Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2009), n.p.

<sup>96</sup> Edward Casey, ‘How to Get from Space to Place’, in *Sense of Place*, eds. Steven Field and Keith H. Basso (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1996), 24.

<sup>97</sup> Ross Gibson, *Memoryscopes* (Crawley, Western Australia: UWA Publishing, 2015), 5-7.

For Hokari, Bird Rose, Casey and Gibson, the relationship between embodiment and emplacement are central to knowing. Places are sensed by lived bodies but are also rendered meaningful by the cultural practices and processes that occur within them. In the field of history, the declarative and representational qualities of individual and collective histories is well understood, but less so are the ways in which history is articulated and transmitted via bodily practices and shared experiences. Maria Tumarkin, in a 2013 article for *Memory Studies*, called for scholars to engage more deeply with acts of memory and remembering that are not defined by ‘intentional’ or ‘conscious’ representations of a ‘mediate past’.<sup>98</sup> Tumarkin advocated a type of research that highlights, ‘processes that take cognition out of the head at the same time as they “mess up” structural accounts of collective memory with bodies, feelings and experience’.<sup>99</sup> In an attempt to think through the ways in which social memory is made manifest through intuitive behaviours and pre-cognitive social practices, Tumarkin proffered an approach to memory and memorial practices that privileges performance and affect by decentring and redefining language and cognition.

Scholar of cultural heritage studies, Laurajane Smith, found more-than-representational approaches useful in attempting to understand how heritage is both an official discourse that regulates the ways that the past is remembered and commemorated in the present, as well as a ‘mentality’ that involves acts or performances of remembering. According to Smith, these practices are constituted by the discourses that mirror these practices at the same time as they

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<sup>98</sup> Maria Tumarkin, ‘Crumbs of Memory: tracing the ‘more-than-representational’ in family memory’, *Memory Studies Journal* 6 (2013): 310-320.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 318.



are constructing them.<sup>100</sup> Citing human geographer Nigel Thrift, she suggests that the ‘focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experience, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions.’<sup>101</sup>

Aside from Hokari’s important work, scant attention has been paid to the more-than-representational qualities of contemporary and ‘everyday’ historical activity.<sup>102</sup> While more-than-representational theories have often been the purview of cultural geography, I, following Smith and Tumarkin, draw on them in this thesis to explore the ‘manifold actions and interactions’ that occur in place and through the body to produce particular understandings of the Bundian Way and its Aboriginal pasts.<sup>103</sup> I draw on these theories because they provide ways of taking cognition ‘out of the head’ and placing it in the body, which I contend is the main vector for interacting and grappling with Aboriginal pasts on the Bundian Way. I also combine these theories with the notion of useable, practical pasts. The immediacy of actions and interactions with Aboriginal pasts that occur in place—on the Bundian Way—and through the body, help to produce histories that are present-centred and future orientated. These, I argue, are ‘practical pasts’ that are better positioned to approach the ethical demands

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<sup>100</sup> Laura Jane Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2006): 13

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>102</sup> Two notable examples are cultural historian and mobilities scholar Georgine Clarsen and Environmental historian Jodi Frawley. Clarsen uses a practice approach to think through the entanglements between bicycle ‘overlanding’ in twentieth-century Australia, settler dispossession of Indigenous land and settler subjectivity. See Georgine Clarsen, ‘Pedalling Power: Bicycles, Subjectivities and Landscapes in Settler Colonial Society’, *Mobilities* 10, no.5 (2015): 706-725. Frawley uses practice theory to argue that practices of recreational fishing influenced by the discourse of ‘catch and release’ have impacted on sustainable fishing practices in Australia. See Jodi Frawley, ‘Kissing Fish: Rex Hunt, popular culture, sustainability and fishing practices’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 39, no.3 (2015): 307-325.

<sup>103</sup> Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, ‘The Promise of Non-Representational Theories’, *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 2.

of the settler colonial present. My thesis attempts to position contemporary cultural practices and communal processes at the forefront of meaning-making in and about past worlds.

#### **1.4 Thinking about Recuperation.**

History-making on the Bundian Way includes more-than-representational ways of thinking about and communicating Aboriginal and settler pasts. This history-making is made in and for the present in ways that encompass a ‘horizon of expectation’ which include a better, more ethical future for Indigenous people. In this thesis I document the development of the Bundian Way by positioning the project as an example of recuperative public history. Pastor and Elder, Ossie Cruse, speaks about the pathway as a place of healing, ‘a pathway of peace’ that can bring disparate groups together. He stated: ‘I think that we need to hold onto that title [Pathway to Peace] because I think it will lead into other areas where we are working together in a partnership, white and black’.<sup>104</sup> Drawing on Ossie Cruse’s notion of healing, I contend that the Bundian Way project is a recuperative space that seeks to build better, more productive cross-cultural relations but also better relations between people and place. Vital to this project of healing is the notion of ‘shared history’ which I contend in Chapter 7 should be understood within the context of Indigenous cultures of sharing and the unique challenges that Indigenous people face when developing, and attempting to share, a public history project in settler colonial Australia.

History is central to the national project of reconciliation. Truth-telling and the righting of historical injustice have been the key characteristics of reconciliation projects in settler colonial nations. In Australia, attempts to tell the truth in terms of the nation’s violent past

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<sup>104</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 6, 2015, transcript AE2.

have fundamentally stalled. As Mark McKenna contends, '[M]ore than any other history, the history of the frontier continues to unsettle and trouble us – we rake over the embers, endlessly searching for redemption'.<sup>105</sup> Bruce Pascoe also reminds us that the past is often fabricated by settler Australians to proclaim our goodness as a nation. He also argues that settlers deflect attention away from their 'sins' by repositioning the blame of fabrication on Indigenous people. He argues that this is a process of 'rearranging the dead cat'.<sup>106</sup>

Raking over the embers of the past and 'rearranging the dead cat' are national pastimes that have stymied attempts to acknowledge and fully embrace Indigenous peoples' spiritual and cultural sovereignty. This is a pastime that 'troubles us' and conjures up feelings of guilt, anxiety and loss that I discuss in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

In my research, the non-Indigenous people that I interviewed often thought about Aboriginal and settler pasts on the Bundian Way through the paradigm of reconciliation. In exploring these responses, I understand that reconciliation is a contested and problematic term. The official project of reconciliation which commenced in 1991 with the establishment of the Reconciliation Council in Australia has been well-documented. Post-colonial critiques of reconciliation have been most strident suggesting that reconciliation is a continuation of the colonial project<sup>107</sup>, a new form of settler nationalism designed to shore up the legitimacy of the nation-state,<sup>108</sup> and a denial of Indigenous difference embedded with an assimilationist

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<sup>105</sup> Mark McKenna, 'Moment of Truth: History and Australia's Future', *Quarterly Essay* 69 (2018), 19.

<sup>106</sup> Bruce Pascoe, 'Rearranging the dead cat', *Southerly* 71, no.2 (2011): 22.

<sup>107</sup> See Damien Short, Australian 'Aboriginal Reconciliation': the latest phase in the Colonial project', *Citizenship Studies* 7, no.3 (2003): 291-312.

<sup>108</sup> Anthony Moran, Aboriginal Reconciliation: Transformations in Settler Nationalism, *Melbourne Journal of Politics* 25 (1998).

agenda.<sup>109</sup> Indigenous people have also been critical of the project of reconciliation, many openly hostile.<sup>110</sup> In 1999 Gumbainggir historian and activist Gary Foley pointedly stated that as a concept and as an official project, reconciliation was devised by white bureaucrats and politicians that at the time of its implementation moved the conversation away from the Hawke government's failed promise to reform Aboriginal land rights legislation toward an 'irrelevant debate' about reconciliation'.<sup>111</sup> Reconciliation also failed to address the material impacts of settler colonisation that were still being felt by Indigenous people. Irene Watson asked: "Will it provide homes for the homeless, food for the hungry, land for the dispossessed, language and culture for those hungry to revive from stolen and dispossessed spaces?"<sup>112</sup>

I acknowledge, like others, that reconciliation efforts that emanate from within the settler state apparatus are not the best way to address the past and imagine better futures. Instead I suggest ways that reconciliation is understood, communicated and practised by a small group of non-Indigenous people of the far south coast via encounters with Indigenous history-making. This adds to a growing body of scholarship that examines the role that settler and Aboriginal pasts play within the project of reconciliation in Australia.

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<sup>109</sup> See Tom Clark, Ravi De Costa and Sarah Madison, 'Non-Indigenous People and the Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation', in *The Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation: Non-Indigenous People and the Responsibility to Engage*, eds. Tom Clark, Ravi de Costa and Sarah Madison (Springer, 2016), 1-14.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>111</sup> Gary Foley, 'Reconciliation: Fact or Fiction', Kooriweb online, [http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/pdf\\_essays/reconciliation.pdf](http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/pdf_essays/reconciliation.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> Irene Watson, cited in Sarah Madison, Tom Clark and Ravi de Costa, 'Non-Indigenous people and the limits of Settler Colonisation Reconciliation', *The Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation: Non-Indigenous People and the Responsibility to Engage*, in eds. Tom Clark, Ravi de Costa and Sarah Madison (Springer, 2016), 4.

According to Bain Attwood, coming to terms with the past has been difficult in Australia not only because of what happened in the past but because of the nature of history making in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>113</sup> Historical narration is central to how nations gain moral legitimacy. Moreover, particular narrative forms have been privileged over others resulting in the silencing and forgetting of Indigenous pasts. Attwood argues that there are two forms of history-making at play—Indigenous and Western historicising—in democratic nation states that cannot be reconciled without causing significant ‘epistemic violence’ to one or the other’.<sup>114</sup> He contends that two competing cultural traditions in Australia have resulted in ‘conflicting attitudes, opinions and feelings about the colonial past’.<sup>115</sup>

Feeling bad about the past has become a national past time that has also structured how some non-Indigenous people understand settler and Aboriginal pasts. Cultural studies Lisa Slater analysed settler emotions in her 2019 publication, *Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism*. She draws attention to settler anxiety which she explains is the conflation between ceaselessly worrying about Indigenous people, embracing their culture and evading their political will.<sup>116</sup> Slater looks specifically at white women of goodwill, who she calls ‘good white people’, to argue that the settler emotions of well-intentioned white women actually work to maintain colonial power structures. Sara Ahmed’s 2005 article, ‘The Politics of Bad Feeling’ similarly addresses settler emotions by examining the shame expressed by

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<sup>113</sup> Bain Attwood, ‘Unsettling Pasts: Reconciliation and History in Settler Australia’, *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (2005): 243.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>116</sup> Lisa Slater, *Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism: Australia Race and Place* (New York: Routledge, 2019) ix.

non-Indigenous Australians when apologising for past wrongs perpetuated against Aboriginal people. Analysing the writings of non-Indigenous Australians in *Sorry Books*, Ahmed argues that expressions of shame are also political acts that work to reposition the shameful white subject as ‘good’. ‘The very claim to feeling bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of being good’.<sup>117</sup> My research also examined the good white subject but looked more closely at the role that settler responses to Indigenous history-making has played in creating particular settler subjectivities.

Other scholars have looked closely at settler and Aboriginal relations by exploring settler responses to indigeneity. Anthropologist Emma Koval analysed the experiences of white Australians working in Indigenous health. Like Slater’s ‘good white people’ and Ahmed’s settlers ‘being good’, Koval’s protagonists are left-leaning, often middle-class, progressive Australians, people she calls ‘White anti-racists’, who want to do good for Indigenous people by working in the Indigenous sector. Rather than analyse settler emotions, Koval examines settler subjectivity and the knowledge systems that inform this subjective identity.<sup>118</sup> She argues that the mediation between difference and equality is how indigeneity is understood with the ‘white anti-racists’ drawing on a particular conceptualisation of difference. Within this formulation, Indigenous people are positioned as culturally different and equality can only be achieved when Indigenous cultural difference is considered.<sup>119</sup> Koval’s research is useful for thinking about how non-Indigenous people encounter Indigenous Australia because

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<sup>117</sup> Sara Ahmed, ‘The Politics of Bad Feeling’, *The Australasian Journal of Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 1, (2005): 81

<sup>118</sup> Emma Koval, *Trapped in the gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia* (Berghahn Books, 2015), 33.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

it highlights particular ways of knowing that inform responses to Indigenous lifeworlds by a particular group of non-Indigenous Australians.

Reconciliation, recuperation, history, pasts, places and bodies are important aspects of the histories and stories that are being told through the Bundian Way project. Brought together they can help us to better understand how past worlds are understood and utilised within settler colonial contexts. In the next chapter I discuss my research methods, paying particular attention to the whys and hows of undertaking research within settler colonial contexts. I look at ‘how’ I conducted my research and consider ‘why’ I, a white female researcher, decided to research an Indigenous-led public history project in my local area. I document the research journey taking into consideration my positionality as a white researcher of goodwill but also as a settler ‘local’ whose history is intimately tied to the place in which my research is situated.

## Chapter 2: Researching the Bundian Way

I would like to begin with the words of two people who have helped to inform my research. The first are from a young Aboriginal man employed to work on the Bundian Way project who I interviewed in 2015. When I sat down to speak with him and his co-workers, racism was in the news again. This time racism had manifest on the sporting field with a series of incidents involving Australian Football League (AFL) player, Indigenous man Adam Goodes. The resultant media commentary exposed a racial divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia and a lack of awareness by some white Australians of racism and its impacts.<sup>120</sup> For this young man the public debate that ensued was symptomatic of a wider settler culture that, since the early years of colonisation, has constructed and disseminated particular understandings of Aboriginal people. During our interview he highlighted these debates and the impacts that they have on him and on Aboriginal people more broadly. He stated, 'Aboriginal people aren't as dumb as people make 'em out to be. They might be dumb when it comes to this stuff, like this [PhD] stuff, but take us out there and I guarantee that we will survive, and you won't'.<sup>121</sup>

One of the non-Aboriginal participants in my study, an elderly retiree, sent me an email shortly after our interview together in April 2017. During the interview at a local coffee shop,

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<sup>120</sup> See Jeremy Stanford, 'Booing Adam Goodes: are we even aware we're racists?' *ABC The Drum*, July 28, 2015, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-07-28/standford-booing-adam-goodes:-are-we-even-aware-were-racists/6653108>, Michael Safi, 'AFL great Adam Goodes is being booed across Australia. How did it come to this?', *The Guardian*, July 29, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2015/jul/29/afl-great-adam-goodes-is-being-booed-across-australia-how-did-it-come-to-this>, and Sean Kelly, 'The Adam Goodes debate is all about race: What the right-wing commentariat gets wrong', *The Monthly Today*, July 30, 2015, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/today/sean-kelly/2015/30/2015/1438240711/adam-goodes-debate-all-about-race>

<sup>121</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, August 3, 2015, transcript AEMFG1.



he spoke to me about his understanding of local Aboriginal history and his desire to know more. He told me about his frustrations at not being able to access the information he desired. As he put it, Aboriginal history pre-invasion was not what he understood history to be but an ‘accumulation of culture’. He spoke about his interest in what he called ‘practical knowledge’ and the ‘true history’ that can ‘pin down changes, events and people’.<sup>122</sup> He emailed me a month after our meeting and said:

One last thought about your research: I think you should bear in mind that the very fact you're conducting these interviews might influence people's responses. (Experiments in many fields of science must be meticulously designed so as not to skew results—though I'm not suggesting you can or should change anything you're doing.).<sup>123</sup>

I start with the words and thoughts of these two men because they inform a key question that lay at the heart of my research: how is it that we come to know the Aboriginal past? The men’s questions also highlighted a central tension in my research. As an academic researcher how do I value and honour the many entangled and multilayered ways of knowing the Bundian Way? The words of these men prompted me to think about my role as a researcher and the role of academic research more broadly. My non-Aboriginal respondent drew my attention to the continuing importance of the idea that history promises scientific ways of knowing the past. He was concerned that I get it right and employ a meticulous approach so as not to ‘skew’ my results. My Aboriginal respondent reminded me that Western ways of knowing and being were not the only ways to acquire knowledge about the world. Both got

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<sup>122</sup> South Coast History Day Attendee (1), interview with Jodie Stewart, March 23, 2017, transcript NAP15.

<sup>123</sup> Non-Aboriginal participant, email correspondence, April 21, 2017.

me thinking about how I might capture the fullness of my research experience and how to pay attention to the complexities and diverse positionalities of historical knowledge.

This chapter outlines the research methods and methodological frameworks that I employed in my research. I have designed the chapter to unfold in sub-headed sections that address three key questions that have informed my methodological approach: how? why? and who? This framing has helped me to structure my thinking about my research, but I also understand that research and the generation of knowledge are not so easily compartmentalised. In coming to an understanding of the multifarious impacts of historical knowledge within settler colonial contexts, I considered the ethics of scholarly research within an increasingly decolonising academic landscape. The questions put to me by my Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents informed my research journey and provoked further questions. As a non-Aboriginal researcher, the reasons why I decided to undertake a study on an Indigenous-led public history project were important not just to me, but to many others that I encountered in my community. This questioning was informed by a long history of colonisation and the ‘epistemic violence’ perpetrated by Western research. The decolonising project both inside and outside of the academy has been in response to Indigenous history-making, which has forced non-Indigenous people to rethink the settler and Aboriginal past. The process of decolonising the discipline of history has, in large part, been precipitated by Aboriginal people authoring their own stories and a broader understanding of how Western historicising has privileged certain ways of knowing.<sup>124</sup> Within the current decolonising landscape, the question of ‘how’ is inextricably linked to the question of ‘why’ and of ‘who’.

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<sup>124</sup> In Australia, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander historians have and continue to critique the discipline of history in particular offering ways of understanding Aboriginal pasts outside of western epistemic frameworks. For example see, Jeanine Leane, ‘Historyless People’, in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening*

## 2.1 How?

The key concern of my research was to examine the many ways that the Aboriginal past is communicated, perceived, valued and used in the present. By documenting the thoughts and experiences of some key people engaged with the Bundian Way project, particularly Aboriginal Elders and activists, and non-Aboriginal people who visited the Bundian Way, I hoped to capture some of the early responses to the project and the histories that were being told at that time. The main objective was to explore how a small group of non-Indigenous people responded to and experienced the Bundian Way and what factors shaped their experience. I explored, via qualitative and ethnographic research, a variety of non-Indigenous people's experiences of walking the Bundian Way, of attending Bundian Way events and of participating and contributing to the Bundian Way project. Via the same research methods, I listened carefully to Indigenous Elders and activists as they told me about the Bundian Way project and what they hoped the benefits to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community might be. I did this to help me understand early engagements with the project and the role of Indigenous history-making in this space.

More broadly, my research has been an attempt to understand how history informs contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations on the far south coast. My aim was to

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*Histories of Place*, eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (ANU E Press, 2015), 151- 162; Tony Birch, 'The Trouble with History', in *Australian History Now*, eds. Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (New South Publishing, 2013), 232-250. Kim Scott, 'Apologies, Agencies, Resilience', in *Frontier Skirmishes: Literary and Cultural Debates in Australia after 1992*, eds by Russell West-Pavlov and Jennifer Wawrzinek (Heidelberg, Germany: Winter Verlag, 2010), 57-70. The discipline of history has also been critiqued and deconstructed by several postcolonial and subaltern scholars. See for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical difference* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, Routledge University Press, 1990).

observe and document new ways of practising history and how the Aboriginal and settler past is being thought about and articulated in new and potentially productive ways. This thesis is an exploration into how the past is known by a small but diverse group of local non-Indigenous people, and the social and cultural impacts of that knowing. My main research question is: How is the Aboriginal and settler past perceived, valued and utilised via cognitive and more-than-representational engagements with the Bundian Way project?<sup>125</sup>

My research question is braided together with other pressing ethical questions that I address in this thesis and were expressed in various ways by my non-Indigenous respondents: what can, or should I do?<sup>126</sup> Engagements with the Bundian Way prompted a settler desire for more knowledge but also prompted anxiety about what to do when faced with more honest settler and Aboriginal histories. These are questions that emerged as I embarked on my research and informed the methodological choices that I made and are ones that I have continued to grapple with as a researcher and a local person. As a settler of good-will who has benefitted from colonialism: What do I do with what I know? What can, or should I do? While these urgent questions demand a response, there are no easy answers and I do not propose any in this thesis. Instead, I hope I have employed research methods that have allowed me to productively and sensitively explore the many ways that my non-Indigenous

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<sup>125</sup> According to cultural geographer Hayden Lorimer, more-than-representational approaches pay attention to ordinary actions and reactions that would normally fall outside of the scope of academic enquiry. These are 'shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions. He contends that while these ordinary actions can often be hard to detect it makes a critical difference to our experience of space and place. See Hayden Lorimer, 'Cultural Geography: the busyness of being 'more-than-representational'', *Progress in Human Geography* 29, no.1 (2005): 83-94. Also see Chapter 1 and my discussion on 'Bodies, Place and Pasts'.

<sup>126</sup> Hayden White, 'The Practical Past: Towards an Ethics of Historical Discourse', February 27, 2012, Events: Oxford Brookes University, podcast, [http://www.history.brookes.ac.uk/podcasts/history/open-lectures/open\\_HaydenWhite\\_01.mp3](http://www.history.brookes.ac.uk/podcasts/history/open-lectures/open_HaydenWhite_01.mp3)

participants and I have attempted to grapple with the complexities of the Aboriginal and settler colonial past, and the material and symbolic legacies that these historical relations have left behind. At the same time, I employed various methodological approaches, which I map out below, that have helped me to consider the ways that local Indigenous people have challenged and reconceptualised dominant understandings of Aboriginal and settler pasts in the present. The new histories that Aboriginal people have been putting forward through the Bundian Way project have forced them to navigate and sometimes attempt to mitigate a range of complex settler emotions that manifest when settlers are confronted with more honest and challenging histories.

My project unfolded in four interconnected stages. Stage one included community consultation and the drafting and submission of my application to the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Wollongong.<sup>127</sup> This occurred in consultation with Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) Land and Sea Country coordinator, Les Kosez; my supervisor, Associate Professor Georgine Clarsen and Indigenous colleagues, Aunty Dr. Barbara Nicholson of the Law Faculty at UOW and Professor of Indigenous Health Kathy Clapham. Stage two involved my first round of interviews and focus groups with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engaged with the Bundian Way project and included interviews with five non-Aboriginal people who had previously camped at Bilgalera (Fisheries Beach), a significant site along the Bundian Way. Stage three involved interviews and focus groups with tertiary students and interviews with secondary teachers at two local high schools. Stage four included interviews with attendees at a local historical society event in February 2017,

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<sup>127</sup> See Appendix 1.

and the analysis of my research data. Throughout the research I continued to meet with and consult with Aboriginal informants.

The primary research techniques employed in my project were semi-structured face-to-face interviews, focus groups and participant observation. I also conducted two surveys using the online survey platform, Survey Monkey.<sup>128</sup> These methods were intended to elicit participants' thoughts and feelings about complex histories and pasts but also their thought processes; how they knew. I wanted to explore the different modalities of knowing that my respondents were utilising to grapple with these complex histories and pasts.<sup>129</sup> How do non-Indigenous people on the far south coast, the area where I was born and now reside, think and feel about the Bundian Way project and how are they processing the histories being told to them via the project?

It was important to design research that would generate productive spaces for participants to reflect on and articulate the ways they were coming to understand the Bundian Way and the Aboriginal and settler past more broadly and to perhaps reflect on the impacts of that process. Face-to-face interviews and focus groups provided a space for individuals and groups to talk about their experiences and to provide me with insights into how the Bundian Way project was impacting them and their community. Other research projects that explored how individuals and community groups understand and engage with the past have similarly employed face-to-face interviews and focus groups. For example, the 'Australians and the Past' research project was a three-year Australian Research Council funded investigation

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<sup>128</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>129</sup> For how I have chosen to differentiate between these terms refer to Chapter 1.

that, alongside 350 telephone interviews, included data generated from 150 face-to-face interviews.<sup>130</sup> As part of a research project, ‘Whose Australia? Popular Understandings of the Nation’s Past’, public historian Anna Clark interviewed 100 people in group interviews across the country. Both research projects were inspired and informed by a 1998 American study led by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, which employed a large-scale telephone survey.<sup>131</sup>

My research was inspired by Clark’s methodologies which allowed her to ask how people engage with different readings of history in everyday contexts.<sup>132</sup> Like my own research aims, Clark did not set out to test people’s historical knowledge but instead asked them to reflect on what they thought and felt about their nation’s histories as a way of knowing about the past. To do this she utilised a methodology espoused by David Henige named ‘oral historiography’.<sup>133</sup> This methodological framework brings together techniques of oral history, focus group work and qualitative analysis.<sup>134</sup> Discussing her choice of research methods, Clark stated that ‘conversation’ was ‘critical to any exploration of intersections between community and public historical meaning’.<sup>135</sup> As she stated of her research participants: ‘at times I thought that I was listening in on their discussions, rather than facilitating them’.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> See Paula Hamilton and Paul Ashton, ‘At Home with the Past: Background and Initial Findings from the National Survey’, *Australian Cultural History*, no. 22 (2003): 5-30.

<sup>131</sup> See Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelan, ‘How we did the survey’, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (Columbia University Press, 1998), 209-232.

<sup>132</sup> Anna Clark, ‘Talking About History: Case for Oral Historiography’, *Public History Review* 17 (2010): 68.

<sup>133</sup> David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (Adison-Wesley Longman Ltd., 1982).

<sup>134</sup> Anna Clark, ‘Inheriting the Past: Exploring historical consciousness across generations’, *Historical Encounters* 1 (2014), 90.

<sup>135</sup> Anna Clark, *Private Lives, Public History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2016), 13.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Generating conversations was similarly central to my research and where possible I attempted to create spaces for informal discussion to unfold among participants in focus groups. I also attempted to replicate this dynamic in face-to-face interviews by asking open-ended questions but by also allowing space for interviewees to talk at length about issues important to them with minimal interruption. My survey questions were similarly designed to generate qualitative responses. I posed open-ended questions to encourage extended written responses.

My interviews and focus group meetings occurred over a period of two years, from January 2015 to March 2017. I also invited participants on two separate Bundian Way cultural tours to share their experiences by completing an online survey.<sup>137</sup> With the permission of interviewees, I audio recorded interviews and focus groups and transcribed them in full. I returned copies of typed transcripts to participants for comment and/or amendments. In all, I conducted twenty-eight face-to-face interviews, four focus groups and two online surveys.

Interviews and focus group sessions occurred mainly in and around Eden, or at the office of the Eden LALC located at the Monaroo Bobberrer Gudu, Keeping Place, Jigamy Farm. All my interviews with local teachers were undertaken at the school in which they were employed, in consultation with the school principal or assistant principal. My focus group session with creative art students occurred at the ANU in August 2015. Five of my face-to-face interviews occurred at the University of Wollongong's Bega campus. At the time of my research, Bundian Way activities were mainly situated in the Eden area and the geographic location of my face-to-face interviews reflects this Eden focus.

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<sup>137</sup> See Appendix 2.



Aboriginal interviewees and focus-group participants were recruited in consultation with Land and Sea coordinator Les Kosez who provided the contact information of key individuals. These individuals were selected based on their engagement with and knowledge of the project, as well as their willingness to speak to me. In addition, I was also invited to various events held at Jigamy Farm where I was able to meet with Elders and activists and speak to them about my research. Recruitment of some non-Indigenous participants also occurred in consultation with Les Kosez who helped to connect me with local school principals and key teaching staff, and members of the Bundian Way Advisory Committee. Upon invitation, I attended a whole of staff meeting at a local high school and, after speaking with them about my research, eight teachers agreed to be interviewed. Although I did not consciously apply the ‘snow-ball’ recruitment technique, some interview participants suggested other people or groups that I should speak with which led to future contacts.<sup>138</sup> For example, my interview with a member of the Bundian Way Advisory Committee led to the recruitment of two interstate artists who were involved with Bundian Way projects. The artists then led me to a small cohort of tertiary students.

Sometimes participants came from unexpected places. Over the course of my research I was often invited to speak publicly about my research on the radio, in the newspaper, as well as at community meetings. Responses to my research from audience members proved a rich source of data. My focus on the ‘shared’ settler and Aboriginal past resonated with the mainly non-Aboriginal audience members who utilised these forums to express their feelings about this past and share insights about their own understanding of the history of the Bundian Way. It became clear to me later in my research that the Bundian Way project, and the histories and

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<sup>138</sup> For an explanation of the snow-ball sampling technique see Lisa M. Given ed., *The Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research* (California: Sage Publishing, 2008), 815-816.

stories that it was generating, were not only impacting on tour attendees and those involved with the management and care of the pathway but many in the broader far south coast community as well. In 2017, I approached the principal of the South Coast History Society, Peter Lacey, to ask if he would assist me to recruit potential participants who had attended a South Coast History Society History Day where I had been invited to speak. On my behalf, Peter Lacey emailed History Day attendees an invitation to participate in my research. Out of the ninety attendees, four contacted me and I interviewed two of them for this project.

My face-to-face interviews ranged in length from eleven minutes to over an hour and a half. I asked participants questions about their knowledge of the pathway and of Aboriginal and settler history more broadly.<sup>139</sup> I also asked them to share their feelings and opinions about this history and to share their thoughts regarding walking the pathway or being on country and how these experiences impacted on their understanding of Aboriginal and settler histories. My participation in Bundian Way events provided another way for me to understand how individuals and communities interacted with and experienced the pathway via a range of modalities. These modalities included walking, activities involved in working and caring for country, emotional responses to cultural tours and other Bundian Way activities, and also sensory engagements with cultural landscapes that included intuition, sight, sound, touch and smell, and collective and individual memories. I also observed participants' non-verbal responses to cultural tours and other Bundian Way events, which I recorded in my fieldwork journal. I observed the way that participants interacted with one another and with tour guides, paying particular attention to body language, facial expressions,

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<sup>139</sup> See Appendix 2.

and tone of voice. In face-to-face interviews, I was also alert to the many ways in which participants responded to my questions, which included non-verbal cues like body language.

I documented my own thoughts, feelings and experiences of walking the parts of the pathway and of attending cultural tours. I also wrote down my responses after hearing honest histories and experiences of settler colonisation shared by Indigenous informants. Reading through my journal, I observed patterns of thought and affect that resembled the responses shared by my non-Indigenous informants. I became aware that I was more than a participant observer, which the late Japanese historian of Aboriginal history Minoru Hokari argued can be an impossible position to occupy in fieldwork research.<sup>140</sup> I was a settler person of good-will who was also doing research on Indigenous history-making. Like my non-Indigenous informants, I was hearing more honest histories and grappling with Aboriginal and settler pasts through bodily engagements with place, and through my interactions with others. These engagements produced particular affects, which I discuss in Chapter 6. These types of engagements exceeded the ‘participation observation’ matrix that is expounded by many researchers as a valuable ethnographic research tool.<sup>141</sup> How can you participate and observe at the same time? Especially when observation presumes objectivity and participation begets a subjectivity. How could I be a ‘good white person’ who purely observed? Was I not grappling with settler and Aboriginal pasts just like my non-Indigenous informants? And how

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<sup>140</sup> Hokari, *Gurindji Journey*, 32.

<sup>141</sup> See for example Kathleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt, ‘Why Participant Observation is Important’, *Participant Observation a Guide for Fieldworkers 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2011), 10-15 and Kathleen Musante, ‘Participant Observation’, in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, eds. Russell Bernard and Clarence C. Gravlee (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 251-295.

could I straddle the objectivity/subjectivity paradigm when I could feel honest histories radiating through my body like white heat?

Hokari's work provided me with an ethnographic approach for my fieldwork and helped me to understand the many ways my respondents and I interacted and connected with the Aboriginal and settler past through the body and in utilitarian ways.<sup>142</sup> While Clarke's approach helped me to unpack what my informants said in interviews, surveys and focus groups, Hokari's provided ways of understanding engagements with pasts through bodies and in practical ways.<sup>143</sup> In this context, Hokari's methodology provided a way of examining particular historical and mnemonic practices and processes that could extend my focus beyond how my respondents verbally represented their experiences of the pathway. Hokari's methodology for researching Gurindji historical practice combined aspects of 'orthodox' oral history research and fieldwork approaches undertaken by anthropologists. To document how the Gurindji people 'practice history as part of their everyday lives', Hokari needed to experience history according to Gurindji historical practice. Hokari eschewed the artificiality of the 'interviewing room' to share in the historical practice of the Gurindji and 'do history' with them.<sup>144</sup>

Like Hokari, I wanted to understand how the past was utilised and thought about by exposure to and immersion in the historical practice of my Indigenous informants.<sup>145</sup> This practice situated me, the researcher, as an active participant within, and respondent to, the research: in

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<sup>142</sup> Hokari, *Gurindji Journey*, 43.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 32.

walking sections of the pathway, through my participation in cultural tours held at Jigamy Farm, my involvement with the Advisory Committee and my attendance at various Bundian Way events. I was simultaneously participating and observing but also responding to and generating knowledge about the world around me. My ethnographic approach comprised methodologies borrowed from cultural geography, anthropology and sociology, which included multimodal and multisensorial engagements with place.<sup>146</sup> Like my participants, I was experiencing the Bundian Way in more than verbal ways; with my sense perception, my emotions and my interaction with others and the physical environment. These factors impacted on how I understood the Bundian Way project and the pathway, and consequently how I interpreted my participants' responses.

My interview transcripts and fieldwork notes provided a rich source of data that I spent many hours trying to unravel. While I approached my research with central research questions, I was not looking to prove a hypothesis or challenge an existing study. Through ongoing engagements with my data which included many hours transcribing recorded interviews and focus group sessions, reoccurring themes emerged that generated new questions. I encountered some common narratives and stories about Aboriginal and settler pasts and of the Bundian Way. I was able to identify patterns of social practices and behaviours, which helped me to propose theoretical conclusions about a process of history-making unfolding in my local community. This approach resembles the 'grounded theory methodology' where

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<sup>146</sup> Anthropologist Sarah Pink explains that this type of approach involves 'empathetic engagement with the practices and places that are important to the people participating in the research' which means that researchers do not principally collect data about participants but rather, researchers focus on the production of meaning through participating in a shared activity in a shared place. See Sarah Pink, 'Multimodality, multisensoriality and ethnographic knowing: social semiotics and the phenomenology of perception', *Qualitative Research* 11, no.3 (2011): 271.

theory is built from the ground-up through interaction with the data, making comparisons and asking questions of the data.<sup>147 148</sup>

The first stage of my research involved connecting with and building relations with the local Aboriginal community in which my research was situated, as well as non-Indigenous employees working on the project and the people and organisations that were part of the Bundian Way Advisory Committee. I spent time at the beginning of my project developing relationships with some of the individuals, organisations, and community groups involved with the project. I wanted to ensure that research into the Bundian Way project would be welcomed, and useful to local Indigenous people. As the guidelines for ethical research make clear, I understood that Aboriginal people have been traumatised and misrepresented by the research process in terms of cultural appropriation, cultural insensitivity, neglect of intellectual property and the research being of no value to them or their community.<sup>149 150</sup> As an academic researcher I was required to ensure that the community were aware of both me and my research, and I understood that consent could not be given freely unless the community were fully aware of my intentions for entering the community, and fully informed

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<sup>147</sup> Colin Robson, *Real World Research* (Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 1993).

<sup>148</sup> I applied this approach understanding the criticisms that have been levelled at it. Norman Denzin argues that this approach that seeks to highlight 'social processes and causal narratives' may be discordant 'with the social justice concerns of Indigenous people'. See, Norman K. Denzin, 'Grounded Theory and the Politics of Interpretation', in *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*, eds. Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (Sage Publications, 2017), 456.

<sup>149</sup> The AIATSIS *Guideline for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* in Australia states that to build a solid foundation for your research consultation and negotiation must be ongoing and free consent must be given. See *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*, 2012  
<http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/research-and-guides/ethics/gerais.pdf>

<sup>150</sup> To ensure the anonymity of research participants who chose not to have their names reproduced in my thesis, I have removed material that could identify them, this includes the date of some interviews.

as to their proposed participation as key informants to my research. Important too, was that consultation and consent was ongoing. I also wanted to gauge community need and gain an understanding of how my research might best benefit the community. Over the course of my research I made regular visits to the office of the Land Council. There I would meet with the Eden LALC CEO Penny Stewart, Land and Sea Country Co-ordinator Les Kosez, Chairperson B.J Cruse and Bundian Way project manager Noel Whittem. Each would become integral to the success of my project and facilitate important connections with the wider community. I also attended Bundian Way Advisory Committee meetings that included community Elders and activists. I became an active supporter of the project by attending various Bundian Way events including exhibition openings and book launches.

Given the time limitations of a PhD research project I was unable to speak with everyone who has been involved with the Bundian Way project. There were many key individuals and stakeholders who Les Kosez recommended that for many reasons I was unable to follow up. Sometimes I started communications and the communication chain went cold. Sometimes key individuals were unavailable or had changed employment. Even in the short time between the survey work in 2010-11 and the commencement of my PhD, key government agencies that had been collaborating with the LALC had been downsized or restructured. Some employees who had been key players in the Bundian Way's development, had become victims of departmental restructuring and had taken voluntary redundancy or had moved on. Planned activities were sometimes cancelled, like the 2015 Back to Country camps which were to be the focus of my research with high school students. Other times individuals were just not interested in talking with me or could not find the time. Some perhaps felt that they had nothing to contribute. In declining my request, one Elder stated, 'I don't know if I can

help you, I just know it's there (the Bundian Way), that's all'.<sup>151</sup> Others indicated their concern at a non-Indigenous person undertaking research on an Indigenous project. For example, one potential participant I approached, a non-Indigenous historian, asked, 'are you Aboriginal? That would make a difference'.<sup>152</sup> Another asked, 'my first question is: are you Koori?'.<sup>153</sup> I understood that for some Indigenous people my research was a low priority or was even something they objected to.

It was times like these that I felt like a cold caller who was trying to sell an intangible product of dubious value. My associate supervisor, Professor Bronwyn Carlson, expressed a similar feeling stating that, 'sometimes you feel like a used-car salesperson'.<sup>154</sup> As with all research, there came a moment when I had to decide to stop interviewing and start writing. Although I eventually stopped pursuing interviews, consultation with employees at the Eden LALC continued over the length of the project. I endeavoured to give Les Kosez and Penny Stewart regular updates on my research and to share with them any significant findings, including responses to cultural tours, and to ask them questions about issues that were particularly sensitive or puzzling to me. I also became a regular attendee at Bundian Way Advisory Committee meetings and in 2015 was invited to become a member of the committee as a representative of the University of Wollongong. At intervals I stepped back from the community, aware that my needs as a researcher were sometimes a burden to them. Imprisonments, death and sickness within the community sometimes immobilised the

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<sup>151</sup> Indigenous Elder, personal communication, September 16, 2015.

<sup>152</sup> Non-Indigenous historian, email correspondence, July 3, 2014.

<sup>153</sup> Indigenous Elder, email correspondence, May 11, 2016.

<sup>154</sup> Dr. Bronwyn Carlson, personal communication, March 23, 2016.



Bundian Way project, and at times profound sadness brought about by the tragedy of loss engulfed the community. I was reminded of the painful realities that Indigenous communities face daily. Many within the community were just dealing with the pain of too many funerals and too many family tragedies.

Through my research approach I came to an understanding that history as it is traditionally conceived was just one of many ways of understanding the settler and Aboriginal past of the Bundian Way. These many ways of knowing were mediated by a range of often painful intersecting social and cultural processes. These processes also included how I negotiated my own status as a researcher and as a local person. Undertaking qualitative research often means navigating the dynamics and complexities of the researcher's status as insider/outsider.<sup>155</sup> Issues of power and positionality are particularly important when considering the dynamics of undertaking research within and across cultures.<sup>156</sup> For me this included thinking through my own motivations for undertaking this type of research but also how these motivations intersected with my own identity as a local person and an academic researcher.

## **2.2 Why?**

Sitting in the Bega Valley Public School library on a rainy December afternoon, I clutched at my manila folder filled with thirty carefully compiled information sheets. I had secured an invitation to the final sitting of the Bega chapter of the Aboriginal Education Consultancy

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<sup>155</sup> See Sharan B. Merriam, Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Ming-Yeh Lee, Youngwha Kee, Gabo Ntseane & Mazanah Muhamad, 'Power and Positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures', *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20, no.5 (2001): 405-416.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

Group (AECG) at the local public school. When I arrived the room was full, the small primary school library brimming with teachers, students and community members eating sandwiches and listening intently to the many agenda items. Teachers, staff and Aboriginal community members had come along to celebrate and share in the successes of a productive year of Aboriginal education at the school and there was a ripple of excitement in the room. I was hoping that my agenda item would be eddied along on the tide of this jubilant wave. I sat patiently waiting for my turn, so I could share my research with the community and ask for their assistance and counsel.

Given five minutes on the agenda to speak, I quickly articulated my research aims and some of my research questions:

I have been documenting the development of the Bundian Way project examining how various community members have engaged with the project and the impacts of that engagement. Thus far I have tapped into the experiences of Aboriginal community members, employees on the project, non-Aboriginal community members, uni students and high school students and teachers. I have run a series of interviews with teachers and one focus group session with uni students asking them to share their experiences, feelings and opinions on the project. I am proposing to run a focus group session at Bega High, tapping into the experiences of Aboriginal students who have participated in Bundian Way projects. I understand that students from Bega High attended Back to Country camps run in 2014.

I would be interested in inviting these students to share their experiences with me in a focus group session that I propose to run in May of next year.

I ended my spiel here and looked across at the faces that loop around me in a semi-circle. There were no concerned faces or looks of confusion; I've caught the wave! The chair asked for questions, there was silence and then the sound of the shuffling of bodies. The chair filled the void: 'how would you like the AECG to help?' I realised that I had left out the answer to this question in my pre-rehearsed spiel. I felt the heat rising through my chest, up my neck. I

commenced by explaining how I would like the AECG members to advise me on how to run the session and on the drafting of potential questions. I explained that I had been liaising with key personnel at the high school, but that the community would be better placed to advise me on matters concerning their children: they know their kids best. There was the nodding of heads.

As silence fell over the group once more, a hand was raised. I indicated that I was listening. The woman looked me squarely in the face: ‘why did you choose to research the Bundian Way?’ I had to respond in real-time, I couldn’t go back over my notes or look back over my proposal document, searching all those beautifully crafted words and phrases. I responded anyway, I had to. ‘I am interested in the Bundian Way as a public history project but in particular I am interested in contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships and how public history projects like the Bundian Way project might inform these relationships’. The expression on her face did not change: ‘so you are interested in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and you want to interview Aboriginal students about their experiences of the Back to Country camps? What benefit is there to these kids?’

My whitefella motivations for undertaking cross-cultural research were issues that I would grapple with throughout my PhD journey. In my early conversations with some of the Aboriginal Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project I told them about my research proposal and asked how I might productively connect with other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involved with the project. As these early conversations unfolded, I began a process of understanding the complexities of undertaking cross-cultural research, particularly in terms of my own subjectivity as a white researcher. Eden LALC Chairperson

BJ Cruse wryly observed in one of our conversations, ‘white man comes into an Aboriginal community wanting to do good, he leaves doing well’.<sup>157</sup>

BJ Cruse’s statement and the woman’s sharp questions at the meeting of the AECG highlight the often-exploitative nature of ‘whitefella’ research in twenty-first century Australia. Well-meaning, well-intentioned ‘white’ researchers enter Aboriginal communities with good intentions, with promises to produce research with tangible benefits, to assist Aboriginal people somehow, to make Aboriginal lives better, to ‘explain’ Aboriginal people and culture and to create knowledge. But often the benefits flow directly to the researcher and not the researched. It is a sordid but not uncommon tale in the on-going story of settler and Aboriginal relations. BJ Cruse’s and the woman’s statements and questions also speak effectively to the problematics of intent, of ‘whitefella’ motivations. BJ Cruse delivered his statement in the office of the Lands Council to nods of agreement from the other Aboriginal staff. This statement and many other interactions and conversations I had over the course of my research had me questioning my own motives: was I one of those researchers, doing well under the guise of doing good?

These dilemmas mirror sentiments expressed by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Smith has written extensively on the important project of decolonising western research practices. She has initiated important conversations about the ongoing impacts of research, often undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers, on Indigenous communities. In her much cited work on decolonising methodologies, Smith stated that for many Indigenous communities research is a ‘dirty’ word that once uttered can ‘stir up silence, it conjures up bad memories,

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<sup>157</sup> BJ Cruse, personal communication, August 25, 2015.

it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful.’<sup>158</sup> BJ Cruse’s and Smith’s statement also speak to the ethical and moral decision that some non-Indigenous researchers make when approaching research with or within Aboriginal communities; the decision not to intrude on and further ‘burden’ Aboriginal people. As historian of Aboriginal history Liam Neame stated in response to his decision to draw on publicly available source material for his PhD research on settler responses to Yorta Yorta land claims, ‘I am conscious of the limited resources that Aboriginal communities have at their disposal and that researchers can easily become a burden on such communities, often with little return to the communities themselves’.<sup>159</sup> Cruse, Smith and Neame’s words provoked important and vital questions for me, a white researcher of Aboriginal History. The most pertinent of these are: in the context of decolonising methodologies, why research at all?

## 2.3 Who?

The question of why I decided to undertake this research project is a deceptively simple question but responding to it meant navigating my own subjectivity, of who I am, and why that matters. I was born in 1975 in the township of Bega to parents who can claim a genealogy that stretches back several generations to the early white pioneering families. As I noted in my introduction, my maternal great-grandfather and grandfather employed Aboriginal people to pick beans on their property in Tarraganda. Aside from four years spent in Sydney in my early twenties, I have always lived in the Bega valley. I am also a PhD candidate who is located at one of UOW’s regional campus. I enrolled at the Bega campus as

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<sup>158</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>159</sup> Liam David Neame, ‘Awkward Histories: Place, History, Kin’ (PhD Thesis, Monash University, 2013): 20.

an undergraduate student in 2007, and this is the place in which I have studied and worked for close to twelve years. Like some of my non-Aboriginal respondents, I feel connected to the far south coast in ways that are hard to articulate knowing as I do that my genealogical roots are shallow in relation to thousands of years of Indigenous occupation. This identity places me both inside and outside of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in which my research is situated.

In their discussion of local history writing, Frank Bongiorno and Eric Ekland explored the work of a selection of historians whose histories of people and place ‘reflect their outsider-with-a-difference status’.<sup>160</sup> Historians like Mark McKenna, David Roberts and Peter Read, who are academically trained historians, are not ‘historians-in-residence who form the backbone of a local historical society’ but are positioned outside the community that they are writing about. As Bongiorno and Ekland stated, ‘from the viewpoint of the communities about which they are writing, these historians are not insiders’.<sup>161</sup> In writing a history of place their attachments are informed by their status as tourists, visitors and new arrivals, not as long-term residents or denizens who can trace inter-generational links to the community’s settler past. Bongiorno and Ekland examined these local histories written by these ‘outsiders-with-a-difference’ as a form of ‘vernacular history’ that can ‘disrupt common assumptions about place and belonging’.<sup>162</sup> Academic historians’ status as outsiders infers critical distance from the histories that they examine. This is counterpoised to local community members

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<sup>160</sup> Frank Bongiorno and Eric Ekland, ‘The Problem of Belonging: Contested Country in Australian History’, *New Scholar* 3, no.4 (2014): 46.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

whose ‘powerful sense of ownership’ over local stories position them as uncritical guardians of their community’s past.

A number of my non-Aboriginal respondents, some of them also occupying insider/outsider status, experienced difficulties articulating a sense of self in the face of new understandings of people and place that rendered old identities untenable. Some attempted to anchor themselves to familiar spaces, others chose to stay ‘unmoored’. I, like others of my non-Aboriginal respondents, chose to acknowledge my whiteness and my situatedness as a local person and settler descendant. Yet, like my non-Aboriginal respondents my identity is ‘unmoored’. It was within this uncertain space, where I made a conscious decision to dwell, that I set out to research and write. Throughout my research, I would become increasingly aware of the limitations and possibilities inherent within this space.

To understand my own status as a white researcher I have found it helpful to look beyond the discipline of history and draw on the work of other white female researchers working on Aboriginal projects. Many of these scholars have conducted research in Aboriginal communities and have spent considerable time thinking through (and beyond) the historic and contemporary dynamics of Aboriginal and settler relations under settler colonialism. I have drawn on their work because they helped me to reflect more deeply about issues of positionality and power as a non-Indigenous researcher. Their words echo much of my own anxieties about researching an Aboriginal project as a white female academic. I have also found their work helpful to better understand my own subject position within the broader matrix of ‘whiteness’, which Indigenous scholars show is often overlooked by white

researchers.<sup>163</sup> Understanding myself as a raced subject has been instrumental in navigating the challenging terrain of contemporary settler and Aboriginal identity politics. Scholars like Slater, Ahmed and Koval have helped me to find a language in which to articulate my white settler subjectivity and acknowledge my own subject position in what I believe are more productive ways. Their work has helped produce, what I hope, is much richer, ethically aware research, and a more humbled researcher.

In addressing the ethical ambiguities of academic research, Lisa Slater contemplated a question asked of her by a colleague. In the spirit of collegiality and in response to her increasing fieldwork anxieties, this well-intentioned colleague asked, ‘who do you serve?’ In response to his question she could offer no definitive response because as she stated the answer is elusive, ‘it nips at her heels’.<sup>164</sup> Thinking through this conundrum, Slater first posited that the ethics of cultural research is like a ‘many-armed god’ with the researcher beholden to many masters—people, organisations, history, and the field of scholarship. Slater’s inquiry speaks to an ‘ethics of uncertainty’ that plagues but can also compel her to think and do better. It forces her to re-interrogate her imperatives for ‘doing’ research each time the question is asked, ‘so, what is it you do?’

In that classroom in Bega, where I so wanted to impress and do good, the question of benefit was a straight forward request to explain how Aboriginal high school students, as participants in my research, might profit from it. The question reminded me that the ‘academy’ was not my only master. In undertaking research within a community (or communities) external to

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<sup>163</sup> For example, see Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ‘The White Man’s Burden: Patriarchal White Epistemic Violence and Aboriginal Women’s Knowledge within the Academy’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 26, no.70 (2011): 413-431.

<sup>164</sup> Lisa Slater, ‘Who do I serve?’, *Cultural Studies Review* 16, no.1 (2010): 12.



the academy I was also accountable to others. I needed to continually consider ‘who do you serve?’ and to ensure that my research was firstly welcome and secondly, could deliver benefits to the Indigenous community in which my research was situated. That included the young people that I proposed to interview. The committee member’s direct question and BJ Cruse’s statement forced me to reflect on my research as a ‘many-armed god’ and consider how I might locate a space from which to speak. The question of ‘who do you serve?’ when researching Aboriginal communities is a source of much anxiety. For the white researcher it is a crooked question that is not easily ironed out.

Slater’s rumination on cultural research and the ‘ethics of uncertainty’ is informed by both her subject position as a white female academic and as a fieldwork researcher.<sup>165</sup> Slater acknowledges her own multi-faceted, intersectional identity. Not only is she white and female but also urban-and tertiary-educated. She has described how this identity is rendered visceral and acute through the fieldwork experience. ‘At times my adult self abandons me, leaving me nothing but an awkward adolescent: clumsy, sweaty, too much body, too white, too urban’.<sup>166</sup> Slater expressed the difficulties in finding a subjective ‘node’ in which to anchor her awkward self which is made-up of ‘too much’ that identifies it as out of place, and which in turn renders fieldwork spaces as ‘no-where’. This lack of a solid subjective node

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<sup>165</sup> Slater’s rumination ‘who do I serve?’ that appears in the 2010 edition of the Cultural Studies Review was inspired by her contributions to a one-day research workshop supported by the Cultural Studies and Geographies node, held at the University of Melbourne in October 2008. The work-shop was designed to aid post-graduate, early career researchers and established researchers to think through the ethics of undertaking cultural research within rural communities.

<sup>166</sup> Slater, ‘Who do I Serve?’, 10.

creates a slippage in which her imagined self is rendered homeless. 'Indeed, it can feel like the nation (not the country) slipped out from under my feet'.<sup>167</sup>

Slater grappled with the idea that the researcher can and should locate a 'subjective' node in which to anchor one's self amidst the confluence of competing research demands and the tangle of human and non-human networks. Ross Gibson has made the helpful suggestion that 'in order to move productively out to the larger world of others', one needs a solid subjective standpoint or node which can be utilised to think through the ethical obligations of cultural research.<sup>168</sup> Slater's ruminations on the ethics of research point to the difficulties of locating a 'solid subjective standpoint' especially when the foundations of 'imagined' identity are themselves elusive and hard to locate.

Indigenous social science researchers Aileen Moreton-Robinson, George Sefa Dei and Makere Stewart-Harawira and non-Indigenous researcher Elaine Coburn have insisted that researchers should speak from specific 'somewheres'. Moreton-Robinson, Sefa Dei and Stewart-Harawira stated that as Indigenous researchers they speak from relations with the natural world, ancestors and other Indigenous people. By 'naming and claiming' their Indigenous identity they are able to reaffirm their presence within the genocidal project of settler colonisation and within the academy that has sought to silence them, while at the same time honouring their ancestors and how their insights are rooted in their lands and their forebears.<sup>169</sup> Speaking from specific 'somewheres' includes acknowledging one's social

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.,10.

<sup>168</sup> Gibson cited in Slater, 'Who Do I Serve?',12.

<sup>169</sup> Elaine Coburn, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, George Sefa Dei, Makere Stewart-Harawira, 'Unspeakable things: Indigenous Research and Social Science', *Socio*, no.2 (2013): 336.

location, a social location that is influenced by relations of power, which shapes how knowledge is produced and disseminated. As the researchers have argued, failure to reflect on one's situatedness does not advance impartiality. Rather, academic rigour is predicated on self-reflexivity.<sup>170</sup> This type of reflexivity has become vital to the decolonising project within the academy.

Following Gibson and Moreton-Robinson et al., I acknowledge that I am culturally and socially situated as a white academic researcher and that my situatedness impacts on how I understand the world and choose to interpret it. Like Slater and Gibson, a solid subjective standpoint can be difficult to find. With Slater, I choose to acknowledge the uncertainty of my own identity as it is (re)located in the 'no-where places of fieldwork research'. Being female, white, local, and an academic historian, I am both inside and outside and sometimes 'no-where'. My historical connections to the Aboriginal community place me inside the broader narrative of Aboriginal and settler relations on the far south coast but my whiteness and my status as an academic researcher produces a 'difference'. Located in 'the field' I am once white, local, and a researcher. Yet at times I could feel these identities slipping from underneath me. My encounter with the Aboriginal community in which my research is situated has been akin to Slater's 'affective event' an emotive and bodily encounter with the materiality of Aboriginal life and people. Like Slater, my encounter with Aboriginal Australia is predicated on my own sense of identity, places and histories that are 'not really my own'. When confronted with the 'density of [Aboriginal] people's lives' I am also confronted with my own sense of unbelonging, of being out of place in a place that I also call

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.,336.

home.<sup>171</sup> This is a deeply unsettling experience, but as Slater suggests, it does not have to lead to ethical and social paralysis.

In navigating the ambiguity of my own insider/outsider identity, I have gained invaluable insights from the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants in my research. My non-Aboriginal respondents are people who I call, following Lisa Slater, ‘good white people’. My non-Indigenous respondents all indicated that they were allied with Indigenous causes and supported the Bundian Way project. They expressed an active interest in the Aboriginal community and its history, and also expressed a desire to know more to better understand and empathise with them. As left-leaning, progressive white Australians, they actively championed anti-racist causes often by drawing attention to dominant and problematic power structures as well as racist and painful histories. Many were keenly aware of their role in the settler colonial project and candidly expressed their guilt and remorse. They all demonstrated that they cared about Aboriginal people.

In researching, ‘good white people’, I was like Emma Koval before me, researching my ‘own tribe’. Koval is a non-Aboriginal, white anthropologist who has spent several years researching white, left-wing, middle-class professional people who have chosen to work with Indigenous people to address Indigenous disadvantage.<sup>172</sup> Her work is instructive because through the process of interpreting and trying to understand the words of her white respondents she also had to think through her own subject position and how she was located within her research. My white respondents, like Koval, drew my attention to the problematics

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<sup>171</sup> Lisa Slater, ‘Anxious settler belonging: actualising the potential for making resilient postcolonial subjects’, *M/C Journal* 16, no.5 (2013): i.

<sup>172</sup> Emma Koval, *Trapped in the gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia* (Berghahn Books, 2015), 32-33.

of Aboriginal and white relations which include the emotional dilemmas that some non-Aboriginal people exercise in the act of grappling with their own whiteness. In many ways, I believe that my respondents felt comfortable speaking to me about their anxieties as good white people because of our in-common subjectivity. My Aboriginal participants would tell me directly about the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that race structures their lived experience, knowing that my whiteness precluded me from these experiences. I also understand that my whiteness excluded me from certain knowledge. To my Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, I was an academic historian, and I was also white.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to address the tangled web of questions that underpin academic research in increasingly decolonising landscapes. And although I have attempted to untangle these threads of inquiry to explain my research journey they are not so easily separated. My research methods, my own subjectivity, and my motives for conducting research are intimately bound up with a process of history-making that is the Bundian Way project. In this thesis, researching the Bundian Way is also an examination of western research. The approaches I have described in this chapter provided ways of understanding and interpreting what my participants shared with me, but I also understand that these methodologies had limitations. I am reminded of the concerns expressed by my Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents about the type of knowledge that my thesis would generate. Many of the criticisms levelled at qualitative research, are aimed at its rootedness in the positivism of western science that often occludes other ways of knowing. Western research and its pursuit of truth and validity does not often align with the research imperatives of Indigenous communities. Tuhiwai Smith proposed that the space between research practices and

Indigenous communities needs to be carefully and cautiously articulated.<sup>173</sup> This includes being culturally responsive to the needs of the community and the ways in which knowledge is generated and disseminated. Indigenous knowledge systems are too frequently turned into objects of study. The decolonising project does not make Indigenous knowledge systems into objects of study. Instead, western systems of knowledge become the object of critical inquiry.<sup>174</sup>

My Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants drew my attention toward a decolonising project as a social justice imperative, which Smith, and Moreton-Robinson et al. and others also foreground. For local Elders and activists, the Bundian Way project is part of a broader decolonising process in that it attempts to privilege Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies and to champion Aboriginal historical thinking and practice. Following their lead, I too, have placed that at the heart of my research. My next chapter starts at Fisheries Beach, an Aboriginal place located on the far south coast south of Eden, This place has a deep and contemporary Aboriginal past but was also a popular camping site for non-Aboriginal people until it was closed by the Eden LALC in 2011. Non-Aboriginal campers have built attachments to this place by returning annually, enacting practices that engendered a sense of belonging that was etched into the landscape and into their memory. Attachments to place and the practices that occur within them are central to how the histories being communicated through the project are understood. In this next chapter, I attempt to map out non-Indigenous attachments to a significant Aboriginal place and tease out what that means for Indigenous

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<sup>173</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, cited in Norman K. Denizen, 'Grounded Theory and the Politics of Interpretation', in *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*, Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz eds. (Sage Publications, 2017), 457.

<sup>174</sup> Norman K. Denizen, 'Grounded Theory and the Politics of Interpretation', in *The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory*, Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz eds. (Sage Publications, 2017), 457.

Elders and activists who are endeavouring to build new understandings of place through a process of history-making that similarly privileges practices of returning.

### Chapter 3: From Fisheries to Bilgalera



*Figure 3.1:* Fisheries Beach, Eden NSW.



In Easter 2009, my partner and I took a drive to a beachside campsite located south of Eden in a small valley that looks northeast toward the town. The beach is less than a kilometre long. Eden locals call this place Fisheries, and many have camped here. My partner was told about this place by a friend who had been returning there every Easter for well over a decade. My partner is a new Australian citizen from Wales. For him, camping in beautiful and secluded places is a big part of the experience of becoming a Bega Valley local and performing his emerging sense of Australianess. ‘Camping makes us Australian’, so Bill Garner has argued.<sup>175</sup>

In the Bega Valley, many locals spend their holidays beside the beaches and lakes that the area has to offer. Many return to the same beach or lake, and even the same campsite. Because of this cycle of return, campsites come to feel like ‘home’. On the day that we visited Fisheries, home-making was dotted throughout the landscape. Campers had erected clothes lines, bush showers and toilets (even plonking a ceramic flushing toilet over a toilet sized hole in the ground) and large camp kitchens. I also remembered the sheer volume of campers. They were everywhere, occupying every square inch of cleared land. There were tents—big and small—and caravans. There were also people collecting firewood, travelling back from the beach, or between campsites. The place was buzzing, but change was coming.

The beach was handed back to Indigenous people in 2003 as part of the negotiations around the 1999 Regional Forest Agreement and in 2011, two years after my visit, the Eden LALC closed the beach to campers and day visitors.<sup>176</sup> The decision to close the beach was stated as

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<sup>175</sup> See Bill Garner, *Born in a Tent: how camping makes us Australian* (Sydney: NewSouth publishing, 2013).

<sup>176</sup> See New South Wales State Government, ‘Forest Agreement for Eden Region’, March 5, 1999, New South Wales State Government, 26, <https://bit.ly/2Kqlx3d>

being due to safety concerns, with many campers leaving rubbish and debris that had compromised the safety of others. Pastor and Elder Ossie Cruse said, 'We're not happy that someone could get hurt. We're not doing this out of spite, we're doing it out of care'.<sup>177</sup> The closure caused a great deal of anger in the local non-Indigenous community and among interstate campers, with many expressing their anger and disappointment through social media sites and through online petitions to re-open the camp site. In 2013, an application was made to the Bega Valley Shire Council and the Geographical Names Board to reinstate the Indigenous name for the beach, Bilgalera.<sup>178</sup> This coincided with the commencement of stage one of the Bundian Way which included plans to build a primitive campsite and to re-open the beach with new facilities.<sup>179</sup> In 2018, the beach remained closed, but the anger and dismay expressed by non-Indigenous people who had camped there remained. Again, the Indigenous community had to defend their reasons for the closure.<sup>180</sup> For those campers, Fisheries was no longer home to them because the possession had shifted from the community, who claimed ownership via a cycle of return, to the Land Council who had recently secured private title over the land. It was once their place, a place for 'everyone' to

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<sup>177</sup> Ossie Cruse, cited in 'Land Council Closes Beach', *ABC News online*, March 11, 2011, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-03-11/land-council-closes-eden-beach/2660834>

<sup>178</sup> See 'Aboriginal Place Naming', Geographical Names Board, New South Wales Government, [https://www.gnb.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal\\_place\\_naming](https://www.gnb.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal_place_naming)

<sup>179</sup> See Melinda Cairns-Hack, 'Murcott design a drawcard for the Bundian Way', *Eden Magnet*, December 24, 2013, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/1991063/murcutt-design-a-drawcard-for-bundian-way/>

<sup>180</sup> ABC South East NSW, 'ABC South East Facebook page', April 18, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/abcsoutheastnsw/posts/theres-frustration-among-traditional-owners-in-eden-at-alleged-trespassing-on-pr/1853673168010475/>

come and camp and socialise but now it was denied to them by the fact of Indigenous private ownership.<sup>181</sup>

I start at Fisheries because this place that is loved and remembered fondly by non-Indigenous people is also a site of deep historical and cultural significance for Indigenous people.

Fisheries also represents the coastal end/start of the Bundian Way. For many thousands of years Indigenous people had been travelling to this place along the Bundian Way to camp, for ceremonies and for festivals that centred on the hunting of migratory whales. In the mid-1800s an Aboriginal man Al.mil.gong travelled from Omeo in the Victorian country to Bilgalera to perform a new corroboree for Aboriginal people on the coast. This was recorded by George Augustus Robinson, the Victorian Protector of Aborigines, who was travelling through the area at the time.<sup>182</sup> Post invasion, Fisheries had become a site of mercantile industry including European whaling, timber and in contemporary times, naval armaments. In 2015, in the early stages of my research, I sat down with five non-Indigenous people who had camped at Bilgalera, a place they knew as Fisheries. I was interested to hear of their memories of camping in this place and whether the Aboriginal history of Bilgalera had informed their understanding of camping there and how they interacted with it.

I started my research by inviting my partner's friend, the one who suggested we visit Fisheries, to sit down with me and talk to me about his experiences of camping there. This interview took place at his workplace in Bega in April 2015. He suggested two others who

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<sup>181</sup> Eden LALC holds title over 137 portions of land within the land council boundaries. These include freehold title. See the 'Land and Sea Country Plan: for Aboriginal people with traditional, historical and contemporary connections to land and sea country within the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council region, southeast NSW' (Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority, Australian Government: Department of the Environment Water Heritage and the Arts, 2010), 46.

<sup>182</sup> Blay, John, *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way* (NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 37.

had also camped there for many years, his sister and her husband, and I interviewed them together several weeks later. Through my contacts at the University campus where I studied and worked, I approached a student and Eden local and asked her if she had camped at Fisheries or knew of anyone that had. She told me that she had camped there as a child and later as an adult and also knew of another mature-aged student who had camped there as a teenager. Both agreed to be interviewed for this research. This chapter will consider the various attachments to Fisheries Beach that five non-Indigenous campers built up over years of returning to the site. I will explore how these attachments were formed by exploring the social and cultural practices undertaken within this space. I also consider these attachments alongside newly emerging understandings of Aboriginal places on the far south coast. For many non-Indigenous people of good will, like these five non-Indigenous campers, the journey to new understandings of people and place is just beginning.

### **3.1 Beginnings: Places, Practices, Pasts**

At peak holiday periods, Fisheries swelled with local people, becoming a micro-community of Eden residents. As one camper put it, ‘it had been one of those places that everyone in Eden knew of... it was this place that everybody went...it felt like a town.’<sup>183</sup> One camper in her mid-twenties said that Fisheries was considered the ‘place to go’ for Eden people because it was considered a ‘local area’.

The general consensus is that Fisheries is the place to go whereas Saltwater Creek—a campsite managed by National Parks and Wildlife which is located approximately 12 kms south of Fisheries- is

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<sup>183</sup> Camper (5), interview with Jodie Stewart, April 13, 2015, transcript, NAP5.

full of tourists. So, for me that is an interesting dynamic because the locals like a local area even though there is another area close by.<sup>184</sup>

For these campers, Fisheries became a ‘local area’ because of the lack of tourists and because it was frequented by local people. For another middle-aged camper Fisheries was his preferred campsite because it facilitated the coming together of ‘big groups’. This was an aspect of Fisheries that the neighbouring campsite, Saltwater Creek, could not offer. The middle-aged camper said:

Because the fact is it is a very lovely spot. It is a nice area that we can all go together as a big group. 'Cause what used to happen is, like you'd go there and there was always green grass to camp on because you weren't fenced-off into one little pen. 'Cause you go to Saltwater Creek just up from there and there's just no grass there.<sup>185</sup>

The more tourist-orientated campsites, like Saltwater Creek, were linked to restricted movement which inhibited camping practices that could foster more ‘local’ connections. In comparison, Fisheries was viewed as a place of freedom where you were free to move around and enjoy the surroundings. Fisheries was also free from the camping fees enforced at other campgrounds. This sense of freedom—freedom of movement, free from fees and tourists—created feelings of comfort and relaxation. One middle-aged camper said: ‘you would see familiar faces. When you are disappearing into the scrub it is reassuring to see familiar people around. When you are camping with a lot of unfamiliar faces you don't feel quite so comfortable’.<sup>186</sup> Fisheries was viewed as a ‘nice relaxing place’ where you could feel

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<sup>184</sup> Camper (1), interview with Jodie Stewart, March 13, 2015, transcript, NAP1.

<sup>185</sup> Camper (3), interview with Jodie Stewart, April 9, 2015, transcript, NAP3.

<sup>186</sup> Camper (2), interview with Jodie Stewart, April 1, 2015, transcript, NAP2.

comfortable among ‘familiar faces’ and also free yourself from the trappings of ‘mainstream life’.<sup>187</sup> As one 27-year-old camper, said ‘at home there’s too much going on... sometimes you lose those communication methods and it’s nice to just have that time again, it’s nice you get a lot more out of the conversation, it’s reconnecting with other people’.<sup>188</sup> A middle-aged male camper suggested that, ‘with camping there’s no tension... you’re not competing. You’re all there to do the same thing and everyone does it the same as everyone else.’<sup>189</sup> A retired Bega resident thought the same, as he succinctly stated, ‘when you are camping you are all the same’.<sup>190</sup>

Four out of the five respondents that I interviewed identified types of campers based on how they interacted with the campground. The four viewed a respectful camper as one that maintained the camping site as a pristine, unspoilt place. This involved camping practices that left no human footprint on the landscape. As one middle-aged camper put it: ‘we try to leave it the way we found it’.<sup>191</sup> Most campers concurred that if you bring something in, you take it back out. This was seen as a gesture and practice of respect. As one middle-aged camper passionately stated, ‘we always respect the place... we don’t destroy things for the sake of destroying things’.<sup>192</sup> One retired Bega resident took it upon himself to maintain the campsite for future use, ‘we used to go around and pick anything up we could find, to try and

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Camper (1), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>189</sup> Camper (3), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>190</sup> Camper (2), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>191</sup> Camper (3), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

keep it clean.’<sup>193</sup> Respectful camping practice was defined as primitive ‘bush’ camping. As one 27-year-old camper explained ‘we bring everything with us and ensure that when we leave everything is cleaned up and taken away as well. We just take the basics, we’re not going to live in luxury.’<sup>194</sup> Campers who did not embrace this primitive practice, were viewed as disrespectful in their approach to camping at Fisheries. These campers were often younger visitors to the campsite or out-of-state visitors who exceeded the spatial and moral boundaries of respectful camping practice. As one retired camper stated, ‘Victorians, they were everywhere you know. We went down there [Fisheries] one day and there were two big Winnebagos parked in there.’ As one middle-aged camper also put it, ‘we were down there for what should have been a nice weekend, there was probably about six or eight utes with Victorian number plates, with four-wheeled dirt bikes, and the associated people with them’.<sup>195</sup>

For the campers I interviewed, camping at Fisheries was predicated on spatial and bodily freedoms and a universal code of practice built into the preservation of pristine space. The spatial control of camping places was viewed as anathema to the practice of ‘respectful’ camping at Fisheries.<sup>196</sup> In particular, spatial controls that changed the ‘primitive’ dynamic of

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<sup>193</sup> Camper (3), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>194</sup> Camper (1), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>195</sup> Camper (2), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>196</sup> Dennis Byrne explains that settler colonial landscapes are predicated on a system of spatial control based on an imported European model of land tenure that manifests as a cadastral grid over the Aboriginal landscape. Byrne uses this formulation to examine how racial segregation in settler colonial Australia was a spatial practice and to argue for the many ways that Aboriginal people subverted that system of spatial control. Byrne’s notion of the cadastral grid can be used to explain how ‘good’ campers at Fisheries positioned themselves as spatially compromised and dispossessed of their camping freedoms. See Dennis Byrne, *Nervous Landscapes: Race and Space in Australia*, *Journal of Social Archaeology* 3, no2 (2003): 169-193.

the campsite were viewed as an impediment to camping freedoms. As one middle-aged camper said: ‘when they [the Eden LALC] put in the public toilets in there it made it too easy. It just opened it up too much’.<sup>197</sup> For this camper, the accoutrements of modern life facilitated the influx of people to the campsite. The hand-back of Fisheries to the Eden Land Council and private ownership of surrounding areas created new impediments, the retired Bega resident expressed his sadness at this change, ‘it was a good campsite. We used to be able to drive up the Kiah river and fish, but someone’s bought it and it’s all fenced off and you can’t go up there now.’<sup>198</sup> The respectful campers at Fisheries defined camping as unfettered movement over free and open, ‘local’ places.

Spatial systems: fences, neatly defined camping spaces, toilets, roads and overarching systems of private land tenure were viewed by respectful campers as instruments of control and as a curtailing of their freedoms. The retired Bega resident stated, ‘once Fisheries was fenced off from the ocean it lost a lot of its appeal, I couldn’t go camping, I couldn’t go to the beach, you felt penned in’.<sup>199</sup> For many Eden locals who camped at Fisheries, the erection of fences and gates was an act of aggression and even dispossession by the Land Council. A 2018 Facebook post shared to a community page by a concerned Indigenous community member garnered 94 comments from the local community. In it he expressed his anger at a large group of local people who trespassed on the beach and left rubbish in their wake. One Eden resident responded to this post by saying:

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<sup>197</sup> Camper (3), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.



I read this and it upset me, these are camp grounds where I have shared some of my fondest memories with friends and family! In saying that this land was taken from the locals, we knew know (sic) better than to pack up the swag and go to our favourite spot.<sup>200</sup>

Another Eden resident expressed a similar sentiment by imploring the Land Council to allow locals back in. He said:

How about the land council put in some facilities and employ some local youths to look after it. Then charge people to camp there to pay for it, just like every other camp ground, win win for everyone. Instead of just putting up a big gate.<sup>201</sup>

These Eden locals considered themselves as the dispossessed and the Land Council as the dispossessioner of lands that should be for 'everyone'. Many expressed their connection to this place and their sadness at being denied access by evoking the trope of the 'respectful camper'. One said, 'Loved camping at Fisheries caused no damage did not even fish it out. Alas my kids and grandkids can't enjoy it like we use to'. Another said:

We were always amazed at how much rubbish people left behind. One year we took our trailer out with our gear in it and brought it back to town completely filled (6x9 with cage) with rubbish including a couple of tvs. An expensive trip to the tip but not something we minded doing as we only made a beautiful place to camp nicer for ourselves and others. Always left our area and others cleaner than we

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<sup>200</sup> Camper, Eden Voice, Closed Facebook page, *Facebook*, August 10, 2018.  
[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Fisheries%20Beach%20Eden&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Fisheries%20Beach%20Eden&epa=SEARCH_BOX)

See Appendix 3.

<sup>201</sup> Camper, Eden Voice, Closed Facebook page, *Facebook*, August 10 2018.  
[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Fisheries%20Beach%20Eden&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=Fisheries%20Beach%20Eden&epa=SEARCH_BOX)

See Appendix 3

found it, but dickheads like this ruined and continued to ruin our chances of getting back to the best camping spot on the coast.<sup>202</sup>

For these campers, memories of camping at Fisheries that were predicated on respectful camping practices were an important referent for negotiating its closure by the Eden LALC. The deep Aboriginal history of this place was often forgotten when considering the property rights of the Indigenous community who ‘shut the gate’ in 2011.

The idea that Fisheries should be for everyone was also expressed by the five non-Indigenous people that I interviewed. This was best summed up by one camper who had experienced camping at Fisheries as a teenager and admitted that at the time she did not ‘care’ about Indigenous culture and history.<sup>203</sup> She said, ‘the fact that it was a place for the families to go, in terms of everybody not just Indigenous people, made it out that it was just a camping site, like Bournda or anywhere else’.<sup>204</sup> To this camper, Fisheries became ‘just a campsite’ because it was available to everyone in the community. It became an everyday place, just like other campsites, through a cycle of return enacted by non-Indigenous people. But what happens when Fisheries Beach becomes something else? What happens when Fisheries becomes Bilgalera, and through Indigenous history-making, re-emerges as a deeply Aboriginal place?

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Camper (5), interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2 Beginnings: Becoming Bilgalera

He told me that an old man went out onto the beach and he lit two fires and all the warriors would hide along the beach. And he'd do this dance called "the hunger dance" and dance up between these two fires and call out to the killer whales to help them get a feed. They were hungry. And the killer whales would actually push in another whale, swim out and he would come out and spear the whale and kill it. I would have loved to see it, to be one of those warriors on the beach and watching that old man calling the whales. And that went on for thousands of years. And I believe that's true, that that's a true story of our culture'.<sup>205</sup>

This is the story of Bilgalera. It is an Indigenous story of place that highlights a powerful story of Indigenous whaling practices post-invasion. It was communicated to me by an Indigenous artist five months after I sat down with the five non-Indigenous campers. For Aboriginal people, connection to this beach was predicated on a cycle of return. Bilgalera was a place of return where Aboriginal people from the coast and the high country would converge annually to feast on migratory whales and for ceremonies. Whales and people were enmeshed within this cyclical rhythm of journey and return. Beryl Cruse, Liddy Stewart and Sue Norman explained that European whalers capitalised on these seasonal rhythms and an Aboriginal workforce that would return with the coming of the whales.<sup>206</sup> Yuin Woman Lynne Thomas also explained how European whalers capitalised on this highly skilled workforce and their long-established relationship with whales and dolphins built up

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<sup>205</sup> Aboriginal artist, interview with Jodie Stewart, July 22, 2015, transcript AA1.

<sup>206</sup> Beryl Cruse, Liddy Stewart and Sue Norman, *Mutton Fish: the surviving culture of Aboriginal people and abalone on the south coast of New South Wales* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), 18.

over centuries.<sup>207</sup> This cycle of return is embedded in the landscape at Bilgalera but also within the memory of Indigenous people.

The practice of return was also part of non-Indigenous interactions with the beach that embedded particular understandings of this Indigenous place. Through the practice of returning to camp, non-Indigenous campers have imbued this place with new meanings. Embodied practices embedded in the experiences of ‘bush’ camping re-presented Fisheries Beach as a site of relaxation and leisure and the people who inhabited this space as respectful campers. Moreover, these practices had generated a powerful sense of belonging. Within a settler colonial context, (re)configurations of place are central to settler belonging which is predicated on the theft of Indigenous lands. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, sense of belonging in Australia is tied to the fiction of Terra Nullius and the logic of capital, ‘who calls Australian home is inextricable connected to who has possession’.<sup>208</sup> Respectful camping practices built a sense of attachment to Fisheries while those who disrespected the place—by leaving rubbish or by bringing in large camper vans and motorbikes,—were denied a place within this matrix of possession. Moreover, for many locals who camped there, the logic of capital which saw the Indigenous community obtain private ownership of Fisheries, dispossessed them of their beautiful campsite.

In 2013 the Eden LALC commenced planning to re-open Fisheries Beach, or Bilgalera, as a significant cultural node along the Bundian Way. At the time that I undertook research for

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<sup>207</sup> Lynne Thomas, cited in Bill Brown, Aboriginal Whalers of Eden, *ABC South East NSW Online*, 4 July 2014. <https://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/10/29/3879462.htm> (accessed April 1 2015).

<sup>208</sup> Aileen- Moreton Robinson, ‘I still call Australia home: Indigenous belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing society’ in *uprootings/regroundings: questions of home and migration*, ed. Sara Ahmed (Berg Publishers, 2003), 26-27.

this chapter, the Land Council had contracted renowned Australian architect Glenn Murcutt to design the whole Bilgalera primitive camping area and all facilities and amenities at Bilgalera. Stage one plans for the build included a ‘yarn-up’ place, which would comprise a roofed building with a heavy wooden floor that would project 20-50 metres from the grassy flat over the lagoon. Non-indigenous historian John Blay explained at the time that this structure is set to become iconic and will make the perfect place in which to dramatise and teach land and sea country culture.<sup>209</sup>

This yarn-up place will be the site for the re-telling and performance of Aboriginal place-centred stories. These stories are brought together by a cycle of return that includes embodied and emplaced practices.<sup>210</sup> Bilgalera’s recent history of camping is also part of the story of this place, part of the web of connectivity that connects people to places and places to people. These webs are formed and reformed by human and non-human relations, contingencies and motion.<sup>211</sup> The subjectivities that formed around embodied practices produced particular understandings of Bilgalera, that are now intrinsically part of the spatio-temporal landscape of this far south coast beach. The plans for this site will encourage new bodily and intellectual engagements with this beach and may engender new understandings of Bilgalera/Fisheries and of Aboriginal pasts that remain a vivid and dynamic part of the landscape.

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<sup>209</sup> John Blay, cited in Melinda Cairns- Hack, ‘Murcott Design a Draw card for Bundian Way’.

<sup>210</sup> Deborah Bird-Rose, *Writing place, in Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration*, eds. Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (Monash University Press, 2009), n.p.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

One of the non-Indigenous campers indicated to me during our interview that engagements with the Indigenous history of Bilgalera had forced her to reconceptualise her understanding of this once popular local campsite. Many years after she had camped there as a teenager, she had been taken out to Bilgalera by an Indigenous man who had talked to her about the Indigenous history of the place. From this experience she learnt how to move beyond ‘Captain Cook’ to consider the rich and multilayered history of places. She said to me that hearing the histories from him, ‘was probably the biggest part. And this Indigenous guy just knew so much about it and I had no idea it was significant to them. To point out the birth site, that corroboree area and vegetation plants were all pointed out. I was like, this is amazing, this place is so rich’.<sup>212</sup> Her exposure to Aboriginal histories meant that this place was no longer ‘just a campsite’ it was a place rich in stories and meanings. Through Indigenous-history making, this place had become Bilgalera.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In 2009, I had little understanding of the history of this far south coast beach. I only knew what I had been told by my partner, and what I later saw myself, and that it was ‘supposed to be a beautiful spot that we should go and check out’. It was not until 2014, when I began research for this thesis that my understanding of Fisheries shifted. When I talked to Indigenous Elders and activists about this place, and visited it with them in early 2015, a new history of Fisheries emerged. I heard about ceremonies and practices enacted in that place over thousands of years that had left marks in the landscape often not obvious to non-Indigenous ways of looking. I heard about the singing-in of whales, I listened carefully when

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<sup>212</sup> Camper (5), interview with Jodie Stewart.

I was told about the fight the Indigenous community had with government to get this place back, and about the worries and concerns that they held about locals who continued to camp even after the beach had closed.<sup>213</sup> This new knowledge would fundamentally change the way I thought about that place and my ‘place’ in it. To borrow from the words of one of the non-Indigenous campers, ‘when you learn something, you can’t remember what it’s like to not know’.<sup>214</sup>

In this chapter, I have begun to think about how non-Indigenous people understand place by exploring the experiences of five non-Indigenous campers that have been returning to a secluded campsite on the far south coast that is also an important and vibrant Aboriginal place and a significant site along the Bundian Way. This once popular campsite is significant because through a process of history-making unfolding through the Bundian Way project, Indigenous Elders and activists are once more attempting to imbue this place with Indigenous meaning. In 2015 when I commenced my research, Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way was picking-up pace. Slowly the historical consciousness of some non-Indigenous people was shifting, and Fisheries was re-emerging as Bilgalera. This early research gave me pause to think about how non-Indigenous people came to understand Aboriginal pasts, often by not understanding them at all. The understandings of place that emerged among non-Indigenous informants were not informed by an historical understanding of Indigenous pasts, but conceptions of possession predicated on practices of return and material practices of camping. Engagements with Fisheries Beach by my non-Indigenous

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<sup>213</sup> ABC South East NSW. 2018. ‘ABC South East Facebook page’, April 18, 2018. <https://www.facebook.com/abcsoutheastnsw/posts/theres-frustration-among-traditional-owners-in-edden-at-alleged-trespassing-on-pr/1853673168010475/>

<sup>214</sup> Camper (5), interview with Jodie Stewart.

informants were multi-sensorial and involved material practices like erecting tents, building fires, cleaning-up campgrounds, swimming and boating. It involved a ‘manifold of actions and interactions’ in camping spaces that produced particular attachments to this beach.<sup>215</sup>

Engagements with places and their histories are an important part of the Bundian Way project. Non-Indigenous engagements with the Bundian Way are central to my research with the material engagements of five non-Indigenous campers at Bilgalera representing the beginning of my thinking about these engagements and their impacts. The non-Indigenous camper who encountered Indigenous histories many years after she stopped camping at Fisheries, demonstrated that Indigenous history-making performed in place is powerful and can have enduring impacts. The shift from Fisheries to Bilgalera is the beginning of an important journey for some non-Indigenous people.

In the next chapter, I start to discuss Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way. I examine the ways in which Aboriginal employees on the Bundian Way project have drawn on European histories of early cross-cultural encounters to renegotiate contemporary Aboriginal and settler relations and to counter dominant understandings of Aboriginal people.

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<sup>215</sup> Ben Anderson, and Paul Harrison, ‘The Promise of Non-Representational Theories’. *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 2.



## Chapter 4: Encounters on the Bundian Way

He actually went down and said hello and introduced himself and it says that he made himself very approachable and when they left he picked up his spears and his weapons and said it was fine to walk along the beach. That is probably one of my favourite stories. He could have just walked up and attacked them with spears but he didn't. He walked up and greeted them and swapped food and told them that they were free to walk the beach. And showed them whereabouts they could survey the land and stuff. That is a pretty cool story.<sup>216</sup>

This is the story about a Kudingal man who encountered the British explorer Matthew Flinders on Aslings Beach in Eden in 1798. It was told to me by a young Aboriginal man working on the Bundian Way project, who explained that of all the stories that made up Aboriginal and settler pasts on the Bundian Way this was his 'favourite'. The story has been recounted by non-Aboriginal historians in historical monographs but is also in oral histories told by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The story is a mix of high drama, suspense and comedy, and incorporates affective elements that were often recorded in early cross-cultural encounters between European explorers and Indigenous people. The story also reveals feelings of fascination, fear and terror.<sup>217</sup> What sets the scene is Flinders' encounter with Kudingal women and children who, in seeing Flinders approaching, screamed and ran away, possibly associating him with sealers at Twofold Bay.<sup>218</sup> This incident alerted the attention of an Aboriginal man who followed Flinders on his reconnaissance of the beach.

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<sup>216</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, August 3, 2015, transcript AEMFG1

<sup>217</sup> Inga Clendinnen reimagines a story of encounter between eighteenth century French explorer Nicolas Baudin and his crew and an Indigenous woman as one of fascination but also terror and fear. Inga Clendinnen, 'Incident on a Beach', *True Stories*, ABC Boyer Lectures, November 14, 1999, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures/lecture-1-incident-on-a-beach/3561394#transcript>

<sup>218</sup> Mark McKenna, *Looking For Blackfella's Point: An Australian History of Place* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), 24.

Flinders records the meeting in his journal, noting how the Aboriginal man approached him with ‘careless confidence’ and how they exchanged culinary gifts: a ship’s biscuit from Flinders was exchanged for a piece of whale blubber from the Aboriginal man. Sampling the gifts together they both surreptitiously spat out the unfamiliar food, hoping not to offend or catch the eye of the other.<sup>219</sup>

A young Aboriginal woman working on the Aboriginal Women and Yam fields project explained to me that this story was a ‘story of acceptance’ indicating that the encounter was one where through the shared experience of cross-cultural encounter, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people found common understanding and acceptance of difference.<sup>220</sup> As non-Aboriginal historian Mark McKenna puts it ‘discovery was an unpredictable experience’.<sup>221</sup> For some Aboriginal people on the far south coast of NSW the ‘unpredictable experience’ of encounter is now providing ways of understanding and grappling with the nature of contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. Histories of encounter, like the story of Flinders and the Kudingal man on the shores of Twofold Bay, prefigure narratives of mutual curiosity and recognition, of generosity and hope, and of an Aboriginal culture that was sovereign and assured. This history of encounter is one of many that make up the Aboriginal and settler history of the Bundian Way. Prior to European colonisation the pathway facilitated inter-tribal encounters between Indigenous tribal groups who navigated the pathway via an intricate system of cultural protocols and laws. As BJ Cruse often

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<sup>219</sup> Mathew Flinders, ‘Section IV Part II, East Coast With Van Diemen’s Land South Coast’, *Voyage to Terra Australis*, vol. 1, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00049.html#section3>

<sup>220</sup> Aboriginal employee (2), focus group interviewed with Jodie Stewart, transcript, AEMFG2.

<sup>221</sup> McKenna, *Looking for Blackfella’s Point: An Australian History of Place*, 25.

explains when delivering his many Welcomes to Country, travel along the pathway was regulated by protocols that ensured safe passage but also enshrined specific obligations to care for country.<sup>222</sup> After European colonisation, the Bundian Way became a space of cross-cultural encounters between Europeans and Indigenous people, when Indigenous people on the coast initially guided European settlers along their pathways to the fertile grasslands of the Monaro and the high country.

The history-work undertaken by the young men working on the project included sifting through these stories of encounter to extract meaning and resonance for their own lives and to re-imagine them to emphasise Aboriginal strength and resilience. They recognise in these stories of the past, attributes and qualities that they could see in themselves, their families and the wider Aboriginal community today. For these men, histories of cross-cultural encounter are deployed to contest the dominant settler historiography that has positioned Indigenous people, particularly men, as either ‘violent, ignoble savages’ or the fading victims of colonisation.<sup>223</sup> Following Chris Healy, the histories and stories that these young men recounted to me on the day of our interview could be seen as a form of social memory. Healy defines social memory as ‘the myriad of ways in which relationships between the past and the present are performed’.<sup>224</sup> For Aboriginal people, greater importance is often placed on being

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<sup>222</sup> BJ Cruse, ‘Welcome to Country’, Eden High School NAIDOC day assembly, June 27, 2016.

<sup>223</sup> See Jeremy Beckett, *Past and Present: The Construction of Aboriginality* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1988); Bronwyn Carlson, ‘Constructing the Aborigine’, *The Politics of Identity: Who Counts as Aboriginal Today?* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2016). 17-28; Gustav Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice* (East Sussex: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>224</sup> Chris Healy, *The Ruins of Colonisation: History as Social Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5.

able to live with the past in the present as opposed to the accumulation of knowledge about the past,<sup>225</sup> which is how Western histories are most often conceived.

For the Aboriginal Elders, activists and employees working on the project, ‘an accumulation of knowledge about the past’ was not enough to explain, negotiate or to understand their experiences as Aboriginal people, or the ways in which some settler histories have been complicit in reproducing ossified definitions of Aboriginal identity. Instead, Aboriginal Elders, activists and employees have reclaimed early cross-cultural narratives, often taken from settler archives, as elements contributing to powerful critical histories of settler colonisation. For the young Aboriginal men working on the project, this critique is a form of history-work that provides resources for them to negotiate and formulate ways to live well in settler colonial Australia. The ways in which they go about critiquing and reconceptualising these histories include recourse to Western historicising but also by drawing on, to borrow German historian Reinhart Koselleck’s concept, ‘the space of experience’, which is that storehouse of archived memories, ideas, dreams and values that are utilised in order to grapple with the complexities and problems of the present.<sup>226</sup> The ‘space of experience’ for these Aboriginal men includes embodied experiences of race and racism, ideas of cultural strength and resilience, as well as social and cultural practices that reinforce important community values that are deeply embedded in Indigenous sovereignty. By utilising ‘the space of experience’, Aboriginal men working on the project are able to articulate new truths about themselves and their community and to also navigate future possibilities.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>226</sup> Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), 10.

#### 4.1 Critical Histories and New Possibilities

Prior to my interview, the young men had been busy working on the pathway's infrastructure, such as installing steps and viewing platforms on a section of the path. These men were employed by the Eden LALC as Land and Sea Country Rangers and were coming to the end of a six-month contract to complete the first section of the Bundian Way. That section of the trail is named the 'Bundian Way Story Trail' and wraps around an idyllic stretch of coastline between Eden's Cocora beach and Quarantine Bay.<sup>227</sup> One of the features of the pathway is the retelling, through physical infrastructure and interpretative signage, of relationships that developed between Aboriginal people and a young marine artist, Oswald Brierley, when Brierley was sent to Twofold Bay in the 1840s to manage Scottish entrepreneur Benjamin Boyd's mercantile enterprises.<sup>228</sup> Through their employment, the men had acquired important new skills and trade certificates but were also acquiring important cultural knowledge and understandings about Aboriginal and settler pasts. Each of these men had individual and personal motivations for applying for the positions but common among the responses they shared with me was that working on the Bundian Way project would enable them to learn more about their culture and history. One of the men responded when I asked why he applied for the position, 'to preserve a bit of my cultural history and to learn a bit'.<sup>229</sup> High unemployment and the lack of opportunity for Aboriginal people was also a motivating

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<sup>227</sup> The Bundian Way Story trail was officially opened to the public on Monday April 4, 2016. See Toni Houston, 'Eden's Story Trail Section of The Bundian Way Officially Opens', *Eden Magnet*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/3828599/eden-story-trail-officially-opens/>

<sup>228</sup> Construction of the story trail commenced on February 23, 2015 and was funded by CLUB grants. Clubgrants is a funding program which operates under the Department NSW Trade & Investment, Office of Liquor, Gambling & Racing (OLGR). For more information see <http://www.clubsnsw.com.au/community/clubgrants/about-clubgrants>

<sup>229</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

factor.<sup>230</sup> The ability to secure meaningful employment that would link valuable skills with the opportunity to learn more about their culture and history, and be able to maintain and practice it was also seen as important. As one of the young men put it, ‘actually getting the job was the main thing; actually working on the Bundian Way was just a bonus’.<sup>231</sup>

The story at the commencement of this chapter was told to me in response to my question about the histories and stories that resonated with him. His telling of this encounter narrative highlighted the goodwill and confidence of the Kudingal man in the story and also addressed the stereotypes of Aboriginal savagery that have come to dominate narratives of encounter. This story of cross-cultural encounter is utilised to foreground the role that Aboriginal people played in early exploration. This young Aboriginal man’s retelling of this encounter narrative features Aboriginal generosity and goodwill that included the sharing of important knowledge and important Aboriginal protocols that ensured safe passage for Flinders and his men, as he outlined, ‘he walked up and greeted them and swapped food and told them that they were free to walk the beach and showed them whereabouts they could survey the land and stuff’.<sup>232</sup> He also reimagines this narrative of encounter, as a story of Indigenous hospitality and strength, in order to counter dominant understandings of early cross-cultural relations that feature Aboriginal savagery as an impediment to the imperial project of exploration and discovery. As this young Aboriginal man explained, ‘he went down to say

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<sup>230</sup> According to the Bega Valley Shire Council’s 2012 ‘Social Issues’ paper, 35% of Indigenous people in the shire are unemployed. This is compared to 7% of non-Indigenous people. See Bega Valley Shire Council, ‘Social Issues Paper: Aboriginal People’, *Social Issues Papers* (2012), 37. Independent research undertaken by a local Aboriginal researcher puts this figure a lot higher at almost 70%. See David Dixon, ‘How unconscious bias Against Dark Skin Colour Creates Unconscious Bias’, *Merunga Blog*, September 11, 2017 <http://merunga.blogspot.com/>

<sup>231</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>232</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

‘hello’, he could of speared them. Instead of going down and attacking them and being all savage like it says in the books’.<sup>233</sup>

Young Aboriginal employees working on the Bundian Way project are contesting dominant understandings of the Indigenous colonial experience. They are doing this by utilising the ‘space of experience’ which draws on their own lived experience as young Aboriginal men living in (rural) settler Australia. Their stories show how their understanding of the contemporary Aboriginal past is informed by their day-to-day experiences. The ‘space of experience’ incorporates everyday life, which is both experienced backward and forward in a dual relation.<sup>234</sup> In unpacking his metahistorical categories, ‘experience’ and ‘expectation’, Koselleck explains that:

The compulsion to coordinate past and future so as to be able to live at all is inherent in every human being. Put more concretely, on the one hand, every human being and every human community has a space of experience out of which one acts, in which past things are present or can be remembered, and on the other, one always acts with specific horizons of expectation.<sup>235</sup>

Aboriginal and settler pasts on the Bundian way are part of the contemporary Aboriginal past which is utilised on a day-to-day basis to construct histories that are present centred and future orientated. This is not a static past but a past that is utilised in service of the present. The ‘space of experience’ for these men is a remembered past of embodied and conceptual knowledge of ‘Aboriginality’. The historically constructed trope of the savage and hostile Indigene was foregrounded by their recounting of incidences that involved racism and settler

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Michael Pickering, ‘Experience as Horizon: Koselleck, Expectation and Historical Time’, *Cultural Studies* 18, no.2-3 (2004): 283.

<sup>235</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 111.

violence. These incidences were used to highlight the very real effects that settler histories have had on their lives as young Aboriginal men. In recounting these experiences, the young men highlighted how for them the past, present and future are intimately intertwined.

The lived experience these men spoke of included incidents of racism, feelings of anger, shame and lack of self-worth. One young man spoke to me about the difference between racist settler cultures located in regional areas as opposed to major cities. He said ‘I was in the city for fourteen years and, I won’t say there is not racism, but the racism is spread out equally. Everyone is racist in the city, not just toward Aboriginals, against everybody. You come back here and you’re black, you’re just a piece of crap’.<sup>236</sup> One of the other young Aboriginal men also described what it was like being the racialised target of settler surveillance. He stated that ‘even when I walk into shops here, I feel like I have to grab my money out and have it in my hand so people can see I have cash and so I don’t get harassed’.<sup>237</sup> In sharing their experiences these men also explained how as young Aboriginal people they are perceived as the embodiment of Aboriginal deficit. Any respect that is shown toward Aboriginal people and culture flows toward Elders and the older generation of Aboriginal people, as two of the young men explained, ‘because the older people they have been here for years.... they have respect’.<sup>238</sup> The emotional and physiological effects of this everyday racism were obvious. One of the men explained the hurt that these words and

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<sup>236</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.



practices inflict, 'it hurts you what they say. You get this, you get that, you get extras; you get this from the government... no, you can't do that anymore. It's upsetting'.<sup>239</sup>

Such actions and words have caused ongoing hurt and pain for these young Aboriginal men, but they have also generated productive strategies to help assuage some of the historical and contemporary trauma that has become part of their day-to-day lives. As one of the Aboriginal men explained to me, 'we cop it every day, but we deal with it in our different ways'.<sup>240</sup>

These strategies include the re-telling and re-imagining of early encounters narratives in ways that speak to the ingenuity, strength and compassion of Aboriginal people – both ancestors and living people. For these Aboriginal men these attributes that are being reclaimed through the retelling of these stories speak closer to the felt reality of contemporary Aboriginal community values and social practices. As one of the young men told me, 'Black people, we be some of the best friends you will have in your life. We have nothing but we share everything we have, as black people'.<sup>241</sup> His work colleague also reaffirmed this culture of generosity and sharing, 'and we will still help out our mates and help out our family and that is what we have got to do'.<sup>242</sup> For these men, lived experience of settler colonisation is the 'present past'.<sup>243</sup> The settler and Aboriginal past is made manifest through their everyday interactions and is remembered by these young men as an experience of race. Moreover, new possibilities take place in the everyday through new articulations of identity which draw on Aboriginal and settler pasts but also an anticipated future. By drawing on lived experience as

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Koselleck, *Future Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, 259.

a ‘present past’ these men are enabling new articulations of the history. For these young men their expectations for a better future are prefaced on their experience of race and their everyday renegotiations of dominant settler histories. In this instance time and space enter a necessary interdependence as these young men articulate new truths and fashion new possibilities out of the space of their experience.

#### **4.2 The Contemporary Aboriginal Past**

There is no ‘back there’ for Aboriginal people as the historical structures of settler colonisation continue to impact on their day-to-day lives. In meetings that I have attended and in the conversations we have shared, BJ Cruse often reiterated the fact that his people are ‘a contemporary people’. At a Bundian Way Advisory Committee meeting BJ Cruse interjected on a point of proceedings to draw the committee members’ attention to the importance of representing Indigenous people and culture as enduring, present and dynamic. This committee is made up of government and non-Government agencies brought together to advise the LALC on aspects of the pathway’s development and management. BJ Cruse has spent most of his life engaging with the wider sphere of Indigenous activism on the far south coast. He has spent a lifetime negotiating with government staff, meeting politicians, and navigating settler politics. His knowledge of the political world has been built up over decades, agitating for social and legal change. In discussing the ways in which the histories, stories and memories of Aboriginal people should be represented in interpretative signage along the pathway, BJ Cruse was quick to point out the many ways that Aboriginal people and culture have been presented as existing in the distant past, or not at all. These representations have proven to be an enduring part of the way Aboriginal people on the far south coast are understood. When he spoke that day at the Advisory Committee meeting, his words stayed with me and have come to inform my thinking as an historian dealing in ‘past

worlds'. He said, 'we need to communicate that... we are not a people that do not exist anymore'.<sup>244</sup>

The notion that Indigenous culture is static and unchanging has had a particular impact on far south coast communities whose cultural practices have been viewed through the lens of deficit and loss. Within this discourse, 'authentic' Aboriginal culture is considered as having been corrupted by its exposure to settler modernity. Due to this exposure Aboriginal people are assumed to have 'lost their culture' or they simply cease to exist because they have been absorbed into the dominant settler society.<sup>245</sup> As Denis Byrne has argued, for Aboriginal people the sedimentation of shared history forms part of their distinct identity, and the task of the archaeologist 'is to not excavate that history but to excavate the present'.<sup>246</sup> BJ Cruse also has drawn attention to the dynamism of Aboriginal culture post-European settlement. 'Culture is alive but culture evolves', he has reiterated on several occasions.<sup>247</sup> This foregrounding of the contemporary Aboriginal past through the Bundian Way project is part of the ongoing process within this south coast Aboriginal community to 'invent local futures'.<sup>248</sup> As Land and Sea Country Co-ordinator Les Kosez stated about engagements with

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<sup>244</sup> BJ Cruse, Bundian Way Advisory Committee Meeting, Thursday 22 October, 2015, fieldwork notes.

<sup>245</sup> See Ossie Cruse talking to Bill Brown in 'Bundian Way Preserves and Shares Aboriginal Culture', for an example of how 'loss' is attributed to Aboriginal culture on the south coast. In this interview pastor and Elder Ossie Cruse responds to a question about cultural loss by arguing that there are parts of culture that cannot be erased, and he states; 'culture of extended families or kinship relations... no one can erase that, you can change it to some degree, but no one can erase it'. Ossie Cruse, interviewed by Bill Brown, 'Bundian Way Preserves and Shares Aboriginal Culture', *ABC South East*, July 4, 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/02/4017106.htm>.

<sup>246</sup> Denis Byrne, 'Difference' in *The Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, ed. Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison, Angela Piccini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 301.

<sup>247</sup> BJ Cruse, Bundian Way Advisory Committee Meeting, Thursday 22 October, 2015, fieldwork notes.

<sup>248</sup> Byrne, 'Difference', 301.

settler and Aboriginal histories of the pathway, 'I think understanding the history of where you come from... should give you a better indication of where you want to go'.<sup>249</sup>

The importance of recognising and communicating the pathway's Aboriginal and settler history has been viewed by many as a way of bringing seemingly disparate histories and peoples together. When I asked Les Kosez about the histories that he would like to see communicated through the project he drew my attention to the definition of 'cultural landscapes' as defined by UNESCO.<sup>250</sup> He cited this organisation's definition of 'cultural landscapes' as 'any landscape that has been occupied, manipulated or altered by any and or more than one group of people'.<sup>251</sup> He utilised this definition to make a strong statement about what visitors should learn, 'I want people to come away with the understanding that the Bundian Way communicates to them that we live in a cultural landscape and the history of it is all our history and there is a continuum between 40,000 years ago and today and there is no need to separate black and white histories. Unify it and it will continue to be our unified history, and in a thousand years it will still be our history'.<sup>252</sup> Les Kosez offered a powerful way of re-imagining the continent's history through the lens of ongoing cultural entanglements which have been informed and shaped by a long continued Aboriginal presence. Mark McKenna made a similar point when he declared that from the moment of first contact,

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<sup>249</sup> Les Kosez, interview with Jodie Stewart, January 7, 2016, transcript, AEM5.

<sup>250</sup> See UNESCO, 'History and Terminology', Cultural Landscapes, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/culturallandscape/#1>

<sup>251</sup> Les Kosez, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>252</sup> Les Kosez, interview with Jodie Stewart.

‘settler history became part of Indigenous history and Indigenous history became part of settler history’.<sup>253</sup>

Warren Foster is a Djiringanj man who helped to survey the pathway in 2010 and 2011. In an interview with me he articulated the importance of early Aboriginal and settler histories especially histories of early cross-cultural encounters. Warren argued that:

We should teach both histories. John Blay<sup>254</sup> wanted it to be spoken of as a blackfellas’ track but it’s important to teach both histories. There was evidence of early settler occupation all along the track as well. It would be our ‘ignorosity’ by not telling these stories. But what we do when we tell these stories is that we tell them that our people showed them the way. Our old people shared it back then and they showed them what was the best ways in rough country and showed them the easiest ways to the best coastlines.<sup>255</sup>

Warren Foster is an accomplished wordsmith and has honed his craft through his work as a rap and hip hop artist and as an orator and storyteller. I interviewed him at his home where he told me he was the first Indigenous person in over one hundred years to walk the full length of the Bundian Way.<sup>256</sup> We also talked about the efforts of James Cook and his 1770 journey of ‘discovery’ and ‘scientific exploration’ on the Endeavour; the voyage that led to the eventual colonisation of the continent by the British. In explaining the meaning of his neologism ‘ignorosity’, Warren Foster stated that it is the not knowing but also not wanting

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<sup>253</sup> Mark McKenna, *From The Edge: Australia’s Lost Histories* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2016), xviii.

<sup>254</sup> Blay undertook archival research utilising surveyor’s reports, settler journals and old maps to assist the Land Council to physically relocate the pathway. John published a book titled *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way* which recounts his experiences researching and walking the pathway. See John Blay, *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015).

<sup>255</sup> Warren Foster, interview with Jodie Stewart, January 6, 2016, transcript AA3.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

to know that is endemic to the settler colonial situation. He explained that it was the settlers and early explorers' 'ignorosity' that led to their reluctance to acknowledge Aboriginal sovereignty. This 'ignorosity' is part of the story of Aboriginal and settler relations on the far south coast. It is also part of the broader story of Aboriginal generosity, and the lack of generosity demonstrated by some early and contemporary settler peoples. As Warren Foster stated, 'after all the atrocities, and what they did to us and are still doing to us today they were still willing to open up and share and give and forgive'.<sup>257</sup>

Some Aboriginal histories communicated through the project focus on early relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, when Indigenous people on the south coast 'extended the hand of friendship' and led European settlers along their pathways.<sup>258</sup> As Pastor and Elder Ossie Cruse put it, the early settlers on the far south coast had heard about 'the treeless plains, sheep country up the top'<sup>259</sup> in the Monaro, and had made several failed attempts to find a path through the dense scrub of the coastal ranges but it was 'so steep, they couldn't find this pathway'.<sup>260</sup> He told me, 'I believe it was the first hand of friendship put out by Aboriginal people saying 'we will show you the way up, come this way'.<sup>261</sup> Ossie Cruse also declares that this process of Indigenous generosity toward settler peoples has been incorporated into Indigenous cultural frameworks. 'It is still law that the hand of friendship

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 6, 2015, transcript AE2.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

went out to show them how to get up there'.<sup>262</sup> He emphasised the fact that generosity and the spirit of sharing have always been a part of Indigenous protocols and beliefs.

Dreaming stories that relate to the pathway are imbued with 'law and morals' and also speak to these important value systems. BJ Cruse recalled how he first heard about the pathway, saying to me:

I first learnt about the pathway from an old fulla named Uncle Albie Solomon, he told me a dreamtime story about the pathways where there was a big drought in the dreamtime, where a lot of our people were starving and there wasn't much food around so they gathered up all the food that they had and they gave it to the ten strongest warriors and told them to go west to the Wiradjuri nation and ask them for some food to keep them through this drought period. When they went there to the Wiradjuri country and saw all the golden grass one of the warriors got greedy and said, 'if we have a good feed we can get stronger and carry more food'. And the other warrior wanted to go and ask first but he talked him into it, and so they went out and basically stole all these grass seeds and made this big damper and got some poles and pushed it up against the tree for it to cool and they laid in the shade, and while they were asleep the wind changed and blew the damper on them and they was killed.<sup>263</sup>

BJ Cruse explained to me that this was a story designed to 'teach law and morals' and that 'the moral of this story was not to be greedy and teach you not to steal'.<sup>264</sup> It seems safe to assume that the Kundigal man who encountered Matthew Flinders on Aslings Beach that day in 1798, would have been aware of these important protocols communicated through dreaming stories like the one BJ Cruse shared with me. Biscuits, whale blubber and damper, food stuffs openly shared in gestures of hospitality and goodwill, provide the focal point for

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

the creation and maintenance of productive human relations. These protocols and human relationships have also become the focal point of the encounters narratives that are being reconceptualised through the Bundian Way project and are providing new ways to think through and beyond settler representations and dominant settler histories that have impacted on the lives of Indigenous people living in settler Australia.

Aboriginal Elders and activists working on the project have also acknowledged the vital contributions that the colonists' archive and documentary histories play in informing understandings of the contemporary Aboriginal past. In an interview with me, in which he spoke about a large corroboree held near Eden in 1844, Ossie Cruse explained the importance of archival documents in reclaiming and reaffirming important historical stories. He said 'we learnt how it was done, it was recorded, white people wrote them down and accurately too'.<sup>265</sup> Ossie Cruse further explained that observations published by some European explorers and early settlers have enabled contemporary Aboriginal people to reclaim the language and stories that inform important present day cultural and social practices, people like George Augustus Robinson and Oswald Brierly who kept intimate journals of Indigenous life on the far south coast. Ossie Cruse acknowledged the importance of this writing stating that:

Sixty Aboriginal men went over to what they call Fisheries Beach to perform the ceremony; he wrote the name down 'Bilgalera'. He actually wrote it down so clearly we could track down right where the ceremony took place... he put those names down and if he hadn't they would have been lost to us'.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart. Also see Ian Clarke ed., *The Journals of George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate*, vol. 4 1844-October 1854 (publisher), 150, 145-152.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid



Pastor and Elder Ossie Cruse views the colonial archive as one repository of Aboriginal language and historical stories that can help to build and strengthen Aboriginal culture in the face of denigration and attempted erasure. He characterised the act of colonial writing as ‘a gesture from some white people who weren’t racist and weren’t selective in their dealings with Aboriginal people’.<sup>267</sup> Some Aboriginal researchers have expressed different understandings of the settler colonial archive. In citing his own experiences Western Australia Noongar writer Kim Scott has argued that although the colonial archive can be alluring, Aboriginal people often run the risk of harm and distress when they are confronted with the distorted mirror of colonial (mis)representation.<sup>268</sup> This is particularly painful when Aboriginal people are confronted with representations of themselves that are fashioned out of the lexicon of settler colonisation. He called his own relationship with the colonial archive a ‘prickly’ one but also conceded that the archive is the place where the nation’s shared history resides.<sup>269</sup> In his work researching the land management and agricultural practices of Aboriginal people pre-European settlement, Bunurong and Yuin man Bruce Pascoe has also written about the importance of early colonial archives. In order to counter dominant representations that had entrenched a devaluing of the economy and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, he declared that he needed ‘to begin from the sources upon which Australia’s idea of history is based: the journals and diaries of explorers and colonists’.<sup>270</sup> Like Bruce Pascoe, some Aboriginal people on the far south coast have utilised

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid

<sup>268</sup> Kim Scott, interview with Jodie Stewart, December 2012, transcript.

<sup>269</sup> Kim Scott, ‘Apologies, Agencies, Resilience’, in *Frontier Skirmishes: Literary and Cultural Debates in Australia after 1992*, ed. Russell West-Pavlov and Jennifer Wawrzinek (Heidelberg, Germany: Winter Verlag, 2010), 60.

<sup>270</sup> Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu Black Seeds: agriculture or accident?* (Broome: Magdala Books, 2014), 11.

colonial archives to write histories that highlight a long and continued connection to the area. Ossie Cruse was quick to point out that some Aboriginal people on the far south coast are themselves accomplished and dedicated documentary historians.<sup>271</sup>

The young Aboriginal men working on the project are drawing on representations of past Aboriginal people located in colonial archives but also undertaking their own re-reading and interpretation of them. The young man who shared the story of the Kudingal man was quick to point out that Aboriginal generosity and strength was recorded by early explorers, like Matthew Flinders. He explained to me in regard to the Kudingal man's demeanour on encountering Flinders that 'it says that he made himself very approachable' drawing attention to Flinders writing on the encounter.<sup>272</sup> The young man explained to me that representations in 'books' portray Aboriginal people in countervailing ways, 'as savage'. In this way he indicated how subsequent interpretations had distorted Flinders' original account. This young man was actively critiquing the interpretations of colonial history as represented in books but also re-reading colonial archives to reclaim narratives that speak to more honest representations of Aboriginal people, including humane and life-affirming qualities, like confidence and congeniality. This re-reading of the colonial archive and the critique of

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<sup>271</sup> The work of predominately Aboriginal women researchers has culminated in two publications, *Bittangebee Tribe: an Aboriginal story from Coastal New South Wales* and *Mutton Fish: The surviving culture of Aboriginal people and Abalone on the south coast of New South Wales*. *Mutton Fish* draws on oral histories collected by the authors but also historical records and the work of academic historians. These sources are brought together to tell the histories and stories that speak to a long and continuing relationship that Aboriginal people on the south coast have with their coastal waterways. See Rebecca Kirby, Liddy Stewart, Beryl Cruse and Steven Thomas, *Bittangebee Tribe: an Aboriginal story from Coastal New South Wales* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2009) and Beryl Cruse, Liddy Stewart and Sue Norman, *Mutton Fish: The surviving culture of Aboriginal people and Abalone on the south coast of New South Wales* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005).

<sup>272</sup> Mathew Flinders, 'Section IV Part II, East Coast With Van Diemen's Land South Coast', *Voyage to Terra Australis*, vol. 1, <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks/e00049.html#section3>

colonial representations is one way among many that young Aboriginal men are making histories on the Bundian Way.

#### **4.3 Telling Aboriginal and Settler Histories on the Bundian Way: Experience, Expectation, Hope.**

Some historical narratives of early cross-cultural encounters are becoming familiar stories of encounter and exploration. These narratives however are informed only in part by documentary history. Aboriginal Elders and activists working on the Bundian Way project are re-interpreting and reconceptualising stories and histories of encounter in new ways. They are re-imagining early Aboriginal and settler histories through the lens of their own lived experience, through the ‘space of experience’. This re-imagining links ‘experience’ and ‘expectation’ by providing agency to make the future different from the past. Experiences as remembered and embodied pasts inform expectations of the future by imagining, or in this case, reimagining a different past. Re-imagining is a form of creative agency that does not just expect a different future, but endeavours to make the future different from the past.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Anders Schinkel, ‘Imagination as a Category of History: An Essay concerning Koselleck’s Concepts of Erfahrungsraum and Erwartungshorizont’, *History & Theory* 44, no. 2 (2005): 48.



Figure 4.1: *Young Aboriginal men working on the Bungo Creek Bridge, part of the Bundian Way 'Story Trail'*<sup>274</sup>

In telling these encounter narratives the young men pay particular attention to the affirming attributes of Indigenous people both past and present. Qualities and attributes like generosity, ingenuity and strength are reclaimed and discursively repositioned in the telling of these narratives. One of the young men told another story of Indigenous strength and resilience drawing out these qualities in the telling of the story. He said:

There's another (story), one in canoes, where they chased them around the island. 'Cause where the wharf is, that used to be an island. It wasn't connected back in the day, they just filled it with rocks and made the wharf. But Aboriginal people chased them around there. Three days in a row, they won't give up. They were pretty persistent, they weren't giving up. That's what I took from the story.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Toni Houston, 'Eden's Story Trail from Cocora Beach to Quarantine Bay set to officially open April 4', *Bega District News*, April 1 2016, <https://www.begadistrictnews.com.au/story/3825414/edens-bundian-way-story-trail-on-track/#slide=13>

<sup>275</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart. During the early years of colonisation, stories about clashes between Aboriginal people and European and British invaders at Twofold Bay were often

For this young man Indigenous strength and persistence lay at the heart of this narrative. What he ‘took from the story’ was that Indigenous people did not ‘give up’ on attempts to defend their land and people. These are qualities and actions that are often not ascribed to past or contemporary Aboriginal people. The ‘language of deficit’ as Wiradjuri writer and historian Lawrence Bamblett has called it, has led to a foregrounding of narratives and stories that position Aboriginal people and culture as the antithesis of an allegedly moral and progressive settler culture.

Whilst many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have worked to critique and dislodge the stereotype of the ‘savage Indigene’, the trope of the ignoble/noble savage continues to impact on the way contemporary Aboriginal people are understood and has inevitably influenced the everyday lives of Indigenous people and communities.<sup>276</sup> Within this discursive paradigm, Aboriginal culture is seen as socially deficient, primitive and amoral. For Aboriginal people on the far south coast, historical stories that privilege the humane qualities of past Aboriginal people speak more closely to the reality of contemporary Aboriginal community values and practices. They are also characteristics that render dominant stereotypical understandings of Aboriginal people and culture untenable. These dominant stereotypes that position Aboriginal people as ‘detrimental and taking away’<sup>277</sup>, to

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recorded in the colonial press. Aboriginal people were often depicted as violent, savage aggressors or dangerous hordes that represented an impediment to exploration and colonisation. For example see ‘Conflict at Twofold Bay’ (*Sydney Gazette*, June 23, 1821) *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850*, Michael Organ comp. (Wollongong University Aboriginal Education Unit, 1990), 107-109; ‘Sealers and Aborigines clash near Twofold Bay’ (*Sydney Gazette*, October 7, 1815) *Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850*, 52.

<sup>276</sup> See Liz Connor, *Skin Deep: Settler Impressions of Aboriginal Women* (Crawley, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 2016).

<sup>277</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

use the words of BJ Cruse, have had a particular impact on the way Aboriginal people move through the world.

BJ Cruse explained that exposure to the Bundian Way project and its history will ‘generate an appreciation of Aboriginal people. They will see us as contributors’.<sup>278</sup> The language of Indigenous deficit has entrenched particular beliefs and attitudes about Indigenous people that have proved hard to shift.<sup>279</sup> One young Aboriginal employee working on the project suggested to me that, ‘a lot of people are ignorant towards us’.<sup>280</sup> Wiradjuri historian and writer Lawrence Bamblett explained that the language used to describe Indigenous people tends to focus on the negative aspects of Indigenous life resulting in ‘a picture of inferior and inhumane communities’.<sup>281</sup> Whilst Bamblett has acknowledged that it is important to tell stories that speak to the vast disparities in wealth, education, and health that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people he has also argued that, ‘what is problematic is that they are often the only stories told’.<sup>282</sup> Noongar writer Kim Scott has also expressed this concern. He argued that much standard historical writing has generated narratives that confine Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences of colonisation into contradictory and equally polarising understandings of national belonging. These dominant understandings are regulated by tropes of victimhood and guilt, or, in terms of native title, cultural continuity in the face of hostility. Scott also argued that these narratives isolate the majority of Indigenous

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<sup>278</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>279</sup> Lawrence Bamblett, *Our Stories Are Our Survival* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013).

<sup>280</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, August 3, 2015, transcript AEMFG1.

<sup>281</sup> Bamblett, *Our Stories Are Our Survival*, 174.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

people because they do not reflect the diverse experience of colonisation as ‘lived’ by contemporary Indigenous people.<sup>283</sup>

Engagements with the Bundian Way project present new ways to understand Aboriginal and settler pasts and how they are thought about and utilised in the present. Peter Read has argued that throughout Indigenous Australia today there is less interest in recounting ‘old wickedness’ and the mood is shifting away from the preoccupation with a generalised past. Histories have become an important part of ongoing negotiations and sometimes arguments over how to be Aboriginal in the twenty-first century.<sup>284</sup> In this spirit, the cross-cultural histories that are being narrated through the Bundian Way project re-imagine the colonial interface but also foreground the important role that these pasts play in the present to create new spaces for the articulation of future possibilities. They are also histories that emphasise ‘Indigenous heterogeneity’, to draw on Tim Rowse’s formulation, and look to position new histories and ways of understanding the past that are ‘less predictable, messier, more surprising and occasionally more hopeful’.<sup>285</sup>

The critiquing of dominant settler histories has been a vital part of the ongoing project of decolonisation on the far south coast of New South Wales.<sup>286</sup> In settler colonial nations like,

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<sup>283</sup> Kim Scott, ‘Apologies, Agencies, Resilience’, 61.

<sup>284</sup> Peter Read, ‘Making Aboriginal History’, in *Australian History Now*, ed. Anna Clark and Paul Ashton (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2013), 38.

<sup>285</sup> Tim Rowse, ‘Indigenous Heterogeneity’, *Australian Historical Studies* 45. no.3 (2014): 301

<sup>286</sup> Indigenous activism on the far south coast has been underway since the early years of invasion and is ongoing. Indigenous people have campaigned tirelessly for land rights and social justice issues. See Lee Chittick and Terry Fox, *Travelling with Percy* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfella’s Point: An Australian History of Place* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), Deborah Bird-Rose, *Gulaga: A Report on the Cultural Significance of Mt Dromedary to Aboriginal People, presented to the Forestry Commission of New South Wales and the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife* (Sydney: The Service,

Australia, where the coloniser came to stay, actions that seek to de-legitimise settler claims to land and resources have been integral to Indigenous activism. The project of decolonisation has also been unfolding within the academy with Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians drawing attention to ways in which the discipline of history is implicated in the settler colonial project.<sup>287</sup> Dominant understandings of history that are predicated on a dialectical theory of history have also worked to entrench particular understandings of time and space. Imagining different temporalities has engendered new frameworks and theories of time that push at the limits of historicised time, and of history. As Ann McGrath states of Indigenous conceptions of time, ‘Indigenous ontologies hold complex, entangled and subversive notions of what history might be’.<sup>288</sup>

The story of Mathews Flinders and the Kundigal man, as recalled and reinterpreted by Aboriginal men working on the Bundian Way project, is a new history of settler and Aboriginal relations that highlights important qualities and Aboriginal cultural values. It runs counter to dominant understandings of Aboriginality that are predicated on the contrived stereotype of the ‘savage indigene’ and of a people outside of time. This is a form of history-work that speaks to the concerns of the present because it is also providing ways for these young men to navigate the complexities and challenges of contemporary Aboriginal and non-

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1990), *The Merunga Blog*, available at <https://merunga.blogspot.com/>, Rodney Kelly, ‘Return the Gwegal Shield’, May 30, 2016, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJoacTy8NeA&t=21s>

<sup>287</sup> For example see Greg Lehman ‘Telling Us True’, In *Whitewash :on Keith Windschuttle's fabrication of Aboriginal history*, ed. Robert Manne (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda: 2003 ), 174-84; Tony Birch, ‘I could feel it in my body: War on a History War’, *Transforming Cultures ejournal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 19-32, Gary Foley, ‘Black Power, Land Rights and Academic History’, *Griffith Law Review* 20, no.3 (2011): 608-618.

<sup>288</sup> Ann McGrath, ‘Deep Histories in Time or Crossing the great divide?’, in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Time*, eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2015), 6.



Aboriginal relations. Koselleck proposed that the probability of a forecasted future is derived from the conditions of the past. His perspective on historical time privileges future anticipations over past memories and present contexts. Koselleck chose the metaphor of the horizon to discuss historical time stating that, ‘the horizon is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen’.<sup>289</sup> In Koselleck’s terms this creates a ‘horizon of expectations’ where the horizon of the past is brought into the present and the horizon of the future opens out from the present.<sup>290</sup> In creating new histories of early cross-cultural relations these young men are reimagining past lives and experiences that are made manifest in the contemporary experience, dynamism and ‘heterogeneity’ of Aboriginal life in settler Australia. For these young men, the expectation for a better future is founded on the convergence of renegotiated pasts and contemporary experience.

For some Aboriginal people on the far south coast, ‘social memory and the ‘space of experience’ is better equipped to help negotiate and navigate the complexities, and continued oppressions of contemporary settler colonial Australia. As Hayden White has suggested, these are practical pasts that are better equipped to help solve ethical dilemmas, questions like ‘what should I (or we) do?’<sup>291</sup> Recourse to these pasts has enabled these young men to strategise ways of combatting racism and its discursive and everyday effects. This is a form of historical practice that draws on a utilitarian past to help grapple with pressing contemporary issues.<sup>292</sup> The history-work practised by Aboriginal people working on and

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<sup>289</sup> Koselleck, *Futures Past: On The Semantics of Historical Time*, 260-61.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>292</sup> Japanese historian Minoru Hokari similarly suggests an approach to the past that focuses on historical practice as ‘one aspect of our day-to-day activities, practised within the complex web of our primary objectives, might-as-wells, whatever happens to be convenient, coincides and duties –how we interact with or connect with

engaged with the Bundian Way, is a history for life that is deeply embedded in the experiences, comportments, dreams and desires of present individuals and communities that actively seek strategies and tactics for living.

The young man that told me the story of Aboriginal persistence in the face of attack also indicated that Indigenous stories of cross-cultural encounter can help to enact change by shifting attitudes and dominant beliefs. He said:

It makes other people look about it differently too when you tell 'em little stories and stuff. They start to look at you different, the attitude changes in people, they won't be so uptight. They will start being more polite and looking you in the eyes when they are speaking to you, instead of looking down and going, 'aww, I don't believe that'.<sup>293</sup>

As this young man pointed out, stories of cross-cultural encounters told by Indigenous people, which foreground Indigenous qualities and attributes, can help to shift attitudes. These stories hold the possibility of building better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. As the young man stated, 'they will start being more polite'. 'Instead of looking down' and denying Aboriginal pasts, non-Indigenous engagements with this young man's history-making opens up a new space of encounter. In this space, the settler gaze shifts away from dominant settler histories and stereotypes. As the young man said of the power of Indigenous stories, 'they look at you differently....look you in the eyes when they are speaking to you'.

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the past, bodily, mentally, spiritually; through localities and objects; or in a utilitarian way'. See, Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011) 43, 47.

<sup>293</sup> Aboriginal employee (1), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

Aboriginal Elders and activists working on the Bundian Way project are re-imagining early cross-cultural encounters narratives in ways that recast Aboriginal people as generous and knowing, as intermediaries and negotiators. Their histories pay attention to important social and cultural processes and practices that are part of the richer story of cross-cultural human relations on the frontiers of settlement. This is a different type of history-making that reworks, retells and critiques early narratives of cross-cultural encounters to fashion more productive historical narratives that speak to the concerns of the present. Reconceptualised encounter histories have enabled new spaces for Aboriginal people to navigate contemporary cross-cultural relations. This is a form of social memory that incorporates the ‘space of experience’ as well as Indigenous protocols built up over thousands of years. This history-work is present-centred and future orientated, a ‘future history’ where lived experience is posited as history, and expectation becomes hope.

In the next chapter I explore the historical thinking and practice of Aboriginal women working on the Aboriginal Women and Yam fields project (AWAY). Through a consideration of the words that the young women and Elder Aileen Blackburn shared with me and my visit to significant sites along the Bundian Way, I reflect on how historical knowledge about the Bundian Way project is generated in a different way, through doing and being on country. In this chapter I frame the discussion around Aileen Blackburn’s notion of history and ‘the family album’ which she drew on to explain how the stories generated through the AWAY project are impacting on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. These stories, promulgated through social, cultural and material practices that are deeply rooted in place, have the potential to strengthen notions of Aboriginal and settler belonging in settler Australia.

## Chapter 5: ‘Doing’ History on the Bundian Way

It was one of the biggest staple foods over the summer and winter months, mainly the summer months. And when the festivals were on you would get big clans from hundreds of miles, so you had to have something, a food source that was going to be there apart from the Bogong moth. So the yams, you see, were central to be able to feed everyone. They were like the host food. They allowed us to host other people. Without them we would not of had the gatherings or the talking and all the song and dance and sharing.<sup>294</sup>

Aileen Blackburn, the Elder and leader of the Aboriginal Women and Yam fields project (AWAY) shared this statement on a cold August morning. Aileen Blackburn is a Monero Yuin woman. She descends from a long line of Indigenous women who have cared for and shared knowledge about yams. ‘My family line is connected to the [south] coast and Monaro Tablelands, I learnt some of the things about yams through my Nan—some of the traditions that have been handed down for our women’, she said.<sup>295</sup> The ‘festivals’ Aileen Blackburn described were seasonal events that centred on the harvesting of the Bogong moth in the New South Wales (NSW) High Country in Australia during the summer, and the migratory whales off the coast in and around Eden on the far south coast of NSW in spring. Aboriginal people from different tribal and language groups would travel along a network of pathways to partake in events centred on staple foods. These festivals also saw the trade in weapons and tools among groups. They fostered cultures of sharing which including the sharing of food

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<sup>294</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart, transcript AE1.

<sup>295</sup> Aileen Blackburn quoted in Claudia Ferguson, ‘Women working together to “bring Aboriginal yams back to the bush”’, *Eden Magnet*, July 10 2018, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/5517725/women-working-together-to-bring-aboriginal-yams-back-to-the-bush/>

but also songs, stories and dances, and provided the means for marriages to be arranged.<sup>296</sup>

According to Aileen Blackburn, the yams, and the women responsible for their care, were an essential part of these events.

Native Yams are a tuber-forming plant species that include herbaceous plants like the *Microseris lanceolata*, locally known as Garngeg or Nyamin (or Murnong in Victoria).<sup>297</sup>

Before the introduction of European grazing animals in the mid-1800s, which drastically reduced yam numbers, yams grew in abundance in the dry sclerophyll woodlands and grasslands of south-east New South Wales and Victoria.<sup>298</sup> Aboriginal women are central to the story of the yams, as it was they who nurtured, harvested, collected and prepared this important native plant. They were also responsible for the curation of cultural knowledge important to the yam's survival. Aileen Blackburn remarked that 'when I think about it, I think, they were just incredible those women. To be able to do it in such an instinctive way'.<sup>299</sup>

Various scholars have explored the importance of place and bodies to the transmission and accumulation of knowledge about the past. Drawing on the historical practice of the Gurindji peoples of Daguragu and Kalkaringi in the Northern Territory, Minoru Hokari proposed new

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<sup>296</sup> Beryl Cruse, Rebecca Kirby, Liddy Stewart and Steven Thomas, *Bittangabee Tribe: An Aboriginal story from coastal New South Wales* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), 5

<sup>297</sup> Aileen Blackburn, John Blay and Annabel Dorrough, 'AWAY on the Bundian Way', in *Land of Sweeping Plains*, ed. Nicholas Williams, Andrew Marshal, John Morgan (Clayton, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing 2015), 14. Ethnobotanist Beth Gott has written extensively on the botanical, social and cultural values of the native yams. See Beth Gott, 'Indigenous use of plants in south-eastern Australia', *Telopea* 12, no.2 (2008): 215-226; and Beth Gott, Nicholas S.G Williams and Mark Antos, 'Humans and grasslands -a social history', in *Land of Sweeping Plains*, ed. Nicholas Williams, Andrew Marshal, John Morgan (Clayton, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing 2015), 5-26.

<sup>298</sup> Gott, 'Indigenous use of plants in south-eastern Australia', 222-223.

<sup>299</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

ways of understanding history as lived experience. Within this formulation, history is experienced through bodies and places. An exploration of the historical practice of Aboriginal women engaged with the AWAY project provides insight into the importance of bodies and places to accessing the past and maintaining history. Moreover, it can help to augment our understanding of historical practice in settler colonial contexts by drawing out the role that gender plays in this process.

Because of the fusing of settler colonisation and heteropatriarchy Aboriginal women have encountered the violence of colonisation differently to men. I borrow the term heteropatriarchy from Native American scholars Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill who advocate for feminist scholarship that acknowledges the link between heteropatriarchy and settler colonisation. They define heteropatriarchy as the social systems that legitimise heterosexuality and patriarchy and render other configurations and ways of being untenable.<sup>300</sup> The actions and the words of the Indigenous women engaged with the AWAY project highlight how heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism are inexplicably linked but also how these oppressions might be countered to (re)create more life-affirming ways of being in the world. These are ways and means- embodied and emplaced practices that reaffirm Indigenous women's sovereignty and work toward the ongoing project of decolonisation.<sup>301</sup>

For this research, I employed aspects of oral history, qualitative analysis and ethnographic fieldwork to help understand the Indigenous historical practice of these Indigenous women.

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<sup>300</sup> Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, 'Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy', *Feminist Formations* 25, no.1 (2013): 13.

<sup>301</sup> Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton Robinson states that women's sovereignty is informed by an ontological relationship which 'occurs through the inter-substantiation of ancestral creator beings, humans and country'. See Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Toward an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory', *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no.78 (2013): 341.

My decision to adopt these methodological approaches was informed by my desire to foreground Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way as a form of activism and resistance to settler colonisation, and its claims to Indigenous land; this would require a ‘radical oral history’, to draw on Minoru Hokari’s formulation. A ‘radical oral history’ approach demanded that I pay attention to history rather than try to locate it. As a producer of history this meant having to hand agency over to someone else.<sup>302</sup> To do this, I needed to listen carefully to the histories that Aileen Blackburn and the young women shared with me. I also had to ‘pay attention’ to how I, a non-Indigenous female academic, Aileen Blackburn, and the young women ‘connect[ed] with the past in embodied and emplaced ways.’<sup>303</sup>

My research for this chapter was situated in two key sites; Bondi Springs and Jigamy Farm. Bondi Springs is located on the southern half of the Monaro Tablelands in south eastern NSW. Before European invasion, Bondi Springs provided a resource-rich campsite for Aboriginal families and tribal groups. Bondi Springs is also located on a Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR). This site became a camp for European travellers and bullockies and was viewed as the best place to stop and rest on the edge of the Monaro Tablelands.<sup>304</sup> Jigamy Farm is located half-way between Pambula and Eden on the far south coast of NSW. The site now houses propagation and storage sheds for the planting and nurturing of native yams. Jigamy Farm remains an important meeting place for the Aboriginal community.

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<sup>302</sup> Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 40-41.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>304</sup> John Blay, *On Track: Searching Out the Bundian Way* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), 156.

Young Aboriginal women employed through the AWAY project often spent each Tuesday at Jigamy farm. Located on the shores of the Pambula Lake north of Eden, Jigamy Farm houses purpose-built structures for the regeneration of native yams. The women spend the days digging, clearing, planting, watering, building sheds, and ‘yarning’. As one of the women explained to me, ‘it is awesome because the girls, like they all get out here and have a giggle and get involved, and it’s great to see their enthusiasm’.<sup>305</sup> At the time of my interview, the project employed three young Aboriginal women alongside a non-Aboriginal scientist. Aileen Blackburn leads the AWAY project as a cultural knowledge holder. She explained that it is her role to ensure that the cultural knowledge around yams is handed down in the appropriate ways and to include cultural practices and protocols passed down through generations of Aboriginal women who have cared for and maintained this vital native plant.<sup>306</sup>

Under the AWAY project Aboriginal women are trained, and train each other, in seed collection, propagation and the regeneration of yam fields located on the Monaro tablelands. As Aileen Blackburn explained, ‘we get the natural seeds from country and bring them down and propagate them. We then take them back up to country and re-plant them’.<sup>307</sup> Aileen Blackburn told me about the yams’ distribution and abundance prior to European invasion and during the early years of settlement. During my visit to Bondi Springs, she took in the

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<sup>305</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, transcript AEMFG2.

<sup>306</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>307</sup> ‘Women working together to “bring Aboriginal yams back to the bush”’, *Eden Magnet*, July 10 2018, accessed from Eden Magnet online, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/5517725/women-working-together-to-bring-aboriginal-yams-back-to-the-bush/>



landscape and stated, 'Just imagine! All this was once covered in yams'.<sup>308</sup> Native yams were abundant across the plains of south eastern NSW and Victoria and were an important source of food. Their maintenance was the responsibility of women. In 1840, Victorian Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson, noted that 'murnong' numbered in the 'millions' across the Spring Plains in north western Victoria. In 1841, he described women collecting yams stating that 'each had a load as much as they could carry'.<sup>309</sup>

The AWAY project celebrates a deep pre-invasion history of women and yams but also highlights settler and Aboriginal histories post-invasion. Aileen Blackburn reiterated that settler colonisation and the European pastoral industry are a part of the story of the yams because it underscores how this process affected and continues to impact on the lives of Aboriginal women:

Initially, there was that conflict and competition between sheep and cattle...and that is part of the yam story; that the women were no longer able to meet their cultural obligations by hosting like a hostess is meant to do and to teach the children and to participate in the ceremonies while the men were up in the mountains. So that all disappeared...the trauma of being a trespasser and not being able to practice what you hold dearly to your beliefs.<sup>310</sup>

The Aboriginal story of the yams includes this history of dispossession and displacement that had gendered dimensions. The 'trauma of being a trespasser' is particularly acute for Indigenous women, because as Aileen Blackburn explained this meant that they 'were no

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<sup>308</sup> Aileen Blackburn, personal communication, September 8, 2014.

<sup>309</sup> Beth Gott, 'Murnong-Microseris-scapiagera: study of a staple food of Victorian Aborigines', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 2 (1983): 5, 9. Bunurong historian Bruce Pascoe argues that practices noted by early settlers like Robertson are evidence of a complex and sophisticated Indigenous economy with the domestication of food plants producing crops that could be regularly harvested. See Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: agriculture or accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014), 35-38.

<sup>310</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

longer able to meet their cultural obligations’ as women. These cultural obligations ‘that all disappeared’ helped to shape women’s identity and sense of belonging, and in turn, provided spiritual and physical sustenance to themselves and their community.

### **5.1 Understanding Indigenous Women’s Historical Practice**

As a cultural knowledge holder, Elder Aileen Blackburn has an extensive understanding of native yams and of the ways that Indigenous women have maintained and practised history that was built up over years of being on and caring for country. When I interviewed her on a blustery August day on the shores of Pambula Lake near Eden, she spoke to me about the important work that young Aboriginal women were undertaking through their employment with the AWAY project. This work centred not only on the regeneration of native yams but also the process of reconnecting the women with cultural and social practices and knowledge that had ensured the health and well-being of both Aboriginal people and yams for thousands of years prior to European colonisation. Aileen Blackburn shared with me the significance of these plants which included their botanical value but also their cultural and social qualities. For her the importance of regenerating the yam fields lay not in their ability to be counted and quantified according to Western scientific methods. As she stated, ‘I don’t say in 12 months I want to have one hundred yams, it’s not a measurable thing’.<sup>311</sup> The importance of the yam, as she suggested, is their ability to generate stories and narratives that can reconnect people with country. She explained to me that story-telling practices surrounding the yam were helping to build cultural identity and to connect people and place. She likened this process to the familial practice of collecting images and photos, ‘it’s like a family album’ she

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

said, ‘you can build a story up around the yams’.<sup>312</sup> Aboriginal women are often the custodians of family photos and in this case are also the keepers of stories about yams.<sup>313</sup>

Aileen Blackburn’s family album metaphor directs our attention to the importance of gendered storytelling practices and their impacts on the social and cultural world of both Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal historian Lawrence Bamblett has written about the role of photograph collections in the storytelling practices of Wiradjuri women: ‘photographs help construct portraits of families, add truth to lineage and provide access to people who are no longer there. They also add to the identity of the collector by making connections to people and places’.<sup>314</sup> History-making practices like collecting and keeping safe family photos, or collecting and disseminating stories about yams, asserts women’s sovereign identity and strengthens connections to country and to each other. The practice of telling and maintaining stories about the yam on country is central to the holistic well-being of contemporary Indigenous women. For Aileen Blackburn these are history-making practices that occur ‘out on country’ and help to reinforce a sense of belonging. As she stated, ‘living our culture out on country’ is the way to ensure that ‘things will progressively fall into

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Gaynor MacDonald, ‘Photos in Wiradjuri Biscuit Tins: Negotiating Relatedness and validating Colonial Histories’, *Oceania* 73, no. 4 (2003): 231.

<sup>314</sup> Lawrence Bamblett, ‘Picture Who We Are: Representations of Identity and the Appropriation of Photographs into A Wiradjuri Oral History Tradition’, in *Calling the Shots: Indigenous Photographies*, ed. Jane Lydon (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014), 79.

place',<sup>315</sup> which for young Aboriginal women in particular, is fundamental to their well-being in settler Australia.<sup>316</sup>

Aileen Blackburn also maintains that the yam and the AWAY project is the ideal 'tool' to build and sustain important conversations about culture and identity, and she stated 'the yams, they're the perfect tool, they're the perfect topic of conversation. They're not hard to build culture and hard to talk about. It's not a confronting way for our people'.<sup>317</sup> Many Indigenous people have been displaced from their traditional lands and have not been able to live on country and acquire the vital cultural knowledge that helps sustain connections to people and place.<sup>318</sup> Aileen Blackburn claimed that this dislocation has resulted in some Indigenous people feeling a sense of discomfort discussing aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture, 'not all of us have been fortunate enough to have remained on country and lived on country. (For those that have remained on country) it's very easy to talk about their connection, but not all of us have had that'.<sup>319</sup> Conversations about yams are helping to facilitate new connections to people and place. As Aileen Blackburn stated, "I find the yam

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<sup>315</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>316</sup> Gaynor MacDonald in her ethnographic study of Indigenous photo collections in south-east Australia argues that for Wiradjuri people photos represent a form of cultural capital. The collecting, swapping and stealing of photos has helped to affirm kin-relatedness among people undergoing significant and continual change. As she states, 'photos have provided Wiradjuri people with confirmation of their own past when myth and narrative history have been denied them'. See Gaynor MacDonald, 'Photos in Wiradjuri Biscuit Tins: Negotiating Relatedness and validating Colonial Histories', *Oceania* 73, no.4 (2003): 225-242.

<sup>317</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>318</sup> Michael Young reports citing NSW Aborigines Protection board documents that by the early twentieth century most Aboriginal people on the Monaro were living on the Delegate mission. By the 1920s, the Protection Board sought to 'concentrate' all Aboriginal people at Wallaga Lake where their lives could be better controlled by reserve managers. See Michael Young, *The Aboriginal People of the Monaro* (Sydney, Department of Environment and Conservation: 2005), 397-408.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

project a simple form for a lot of people from different backgrounds and different levels of connection. That's the good part of it'.<sup>320</sup> Like a photograph shared around the dinner table, the yam can be a mnemonic tool to link people to their pasts and open out new knowledge in ways that legitimise the complexity of Indigenous identity and culture in settler colonial Australia.

In her ethnographic study of Indigenous photo collections in south-east Australia, Gaynor MacDonald argues that for Wiradjuri people photos represent a form of cultural capital. She argues that the 'collecting, swapping and stealing of photos...have provided Wiradjuri people with confirmation of their own past when myth and narrative history have been denied them'.<sup>321</sup> Like the photos acquired and imbued with meaning by Wiradjuri people, the yam also functions as a form of 'cultural capital' that enables the accumulation of histories and stories that connect Aileen Blackburn and the young women to the pre-invasion past and past and present Indigenous women who have cared for and told stories about country over many millennia.

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> MacDonald, 'Photos in Wiradjuri Biscuit Tins', 225-242.



*Figure 5.1: Aileen Blackburn at the propagation sheds at Jigamy Farm*<sup>322</sup>

Aileen Blackburn drew attention to cultural and social practices of ‘doing’ that help to build and maintain histories and stories. These practices can initiate deep understandings, ‘you tell stories, you do art, you do song and other things come along at the same time. That’s why the learning, out in the bush and hands on. That’s what triggers everything else’.<sup>323</sup> For her, knowledge about the past is acquired through the various embodied actions and interactions that occur when Aboriginal people (re)connect with country. Being out on country builds knowledge and skills that are vital to the project and to the survival of the yam.

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<sup>322</sup> Claudia Ferguson, ‘Women working together to “bring Aboriginal yams back to the bush”’, *Eden Magnet*, July 10 2018, accessed from Eden Magnet online, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/5517725/women-working-together-to-bring-aboriginal-yams-back-to-the-bush/>

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

If you go out on country, they get to know the lay of the land, the mountains and the rivers. They learn a lot more about where the yam plots fit in, even where they fit in with in the ancestral trails and old camp sites. They get a better feel for it.<sup>324</sup>

Getting a ‘feel’ for country and the ‘lay of the land’ is also bound-up within the complexity of contemporary Indigenous women’s identity and knowing where they fit within the social and cultural world of settler colonial Australia. This is often a world that excludes Indigenous women and diminishes their authority and traditional knowledge. When I asked what it feels like to be on country Aileen Blackburn told me: ‘It’s like the belonging, and I just can’t over emphasise, you cannot avoid the importance of a sense of belonging, doesn’t matter who you are, what your beliefs. It’s important to have... to know where you belong’.<sup>325</sup>

For Aileen Blackburn, belonging is embedded in country and is reinforced through material and cultural practices that occur in culturally significant places. Many Indigenous women do not reside on or near their country which can impact on their sense of belonging that is part of a deep ancestral connection to place. According to Aileen Blackburn, ‘even Elders who have never had the opportunity out in the bush, out on country, they relive their childhood and their stories but you still need that sense of belonging, where you belong’.<sup>326</sup> When the AWAY project (re)connects women with country through yam regeneration it opens up new/old spaces of belonging. Through the project the women are enacting practices that connect them to place and locate their identity as Indigenous women within the millennial

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<sup>324</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

history of country. This connection is imbued with stories and histories and enacted through material practices that act to spiritually tether them to place even when they cannot be physically present. As Aileen Blackburn stated; ‘It’s important to know where you belong, or to know that it’s there even if you’re not there day to day’.<sup>327</sup>

## 5.2 The ‘Yams have brought us together’: Belonging, History, Pasts



Figure 5.2: *Aerial View of Jigamy Farm*<sup>328</sup>

In early August, I interviewed three young Aboriginal women working on the AWAY project. We spoke as they took a rest from their work. When I approached the sheds at Jigamy Farm, I heard a ripple of laughter and the pop and snap of an open fire. I saw one of the women moving around the fire with large exaggerated movements. She was drawing a rake around the leaf litter that surrounded the blaze creating a pile of leaves to load onto the fire. A cool insistent breeze was blowing in off the lake and the other two women had drawn in close around the flames and were warming their hands. I noticed that there were two fires.

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> ‘Jigamy Farm’, *Twofold Aboriginal Corporation*, <https://www.twofoldjigamy.org.au/jigamy-farm>



Aileen Blackburn was leaning close to the second fire engrossed in conversation with a woman who had pulled up beside her in a large sedan. I asked if I could take a place at the fire, and one of the women told me about the importance of the AWAY project to young women like her. She explained, ‘this is what we are here for. The yams have brought us together’.<sup>329</sup>

The inclusivity of the AWAY project is facilitated by the stories and histories that it engenders and is a fundamental part of the learning that occurs on country and at Jigamy Farm. That the project inspires acts of togetherness and connection is also due to the important work undertaken by Aileen Blackburn and the young women employed to care for the yams. Aileen Blackburn believes that ‘the beauty of the yams’ is that it brings together the voices and stories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who may not yet have had much sustained exposure to native yams. Aileen Blackburn explained to me that while the yams are at the centre of the project, the conversational nodes that spring from that centre often generate more expansive conversations. These are conversations, she said, that ‘everybody’ can be part of:

Sometimes it is focusing on Aboriginal culture and our land and our language but there are times when it flows further than that....the conversation becomes the yams and is the trigger for something else; suddenly you are talking about grandchildren and grandparents and how they survived.<sup>330</sup>

Acts of ‘doing’ also open up spaces of inclusivity and belonging and help to generate deep cultural knowledge. These acts are helping to open-up productive and inclusive spaces for

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<sup>329</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>330</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

young Indigenous women who have found themselves shut out of the national narrative and who have had their cultural roles diminished by the patriarchal discourse of settler colonisation. As Aileen Blackburn put it, ‘for myself and the girls, that sense of belonging is everything, that’s very important, that is a big part of the learning’.<sup>331</sup>

Aileen Blackburn explained to me that this act of being ‘on country doing it’ provides the impetus for other actions and practices.<sup>332</sup> This includes the creation of an inclusive space for the accumulation of other narratives and stories that make up the broad spectrum of experience and knowledge that have, over time, clustered around this small native plant species. Aileen Blackburn suggested that this cultural identity is not strictly about ‘who you are or what you are’. This process of narrative accumulation builds and sustains cultural identity. It is knowing that you have a place to return to, that you can say ‘I will go there’ and ‘I will know where I belong’.<sup>333</sup> For Aileen Blackburn and the young women, knowing that you belong is a vital part of the project, as she stated emphatically, ‘A sense of belonging is everything... there will come a time when that belonging will be all they have’.<sup>334</sup> Belonging in this context is not an abstract or symbolic attachment but is vital to living well in a world of continued and sustained change and dislocation.

In Australia, as well as other settler colonial nations, the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the death and displacement of Indigenous people resulted in the fracturing of Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices. With the onset of European colonisation, Aboriginal

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<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

<sup>333</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

women were removed from life-worlds that they were intrinsically part of. Settler practices of assimilation saw attempts to violently absorb Aboriginal women into settler culture.<sup>335</sup> As subjects of settler law, and lawlessness, their identity was predicated on their status as ‘other’. They were both ‘other’ to a masculine settler society and ‘other’ to a fractured Aboriginal world. Aileen Blackburn draws attention to the impacts of this othering when reaffirming the importance of belonging. She indicated that the splintering effects of settler colonisation can be countered by reconnecting with Aboriginal country, which is both a physical space as well as a place of reassurance and emotional nourishment.<sup>336</sup> For these women, in particular, belonging is expressed through their care of yams on country and at Jigamy farm. This sense of belonging is not predicated on bifurcated notions of gender or of settler imposed notions of cultural identity, of ‘who you are or what you are’.<sup>337</sup>

As Aileen Blackburn attested ‘being out on country doing it’ generates a different type of learning and creates an important sense of belonging that is instrumental in navigating a complex and challenging world. The actions and interactions that flow from being on country include engagements with the human and non-human world, and a focus on knowledge acquired by the body as well as knowledge acquired by the mind. The practices that produce histories and stories, modalities of telling and doing, are just as important as the stories

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<sup>335</sup> Heather Goodall suggests that these practices were informed by sexual stereotypes of Aboriginal women and enforced by gendered state policies. See Heather Goodall, ‘Assimilation Begins in the Home: the State and Aboriginal Women’s work as mothers in New South Wales, 1900s to 1960s’, *Labour History* 65 (1995):76.

<sup>336</sup> Indigenous scholar Bronwyn Carlson stated that ‘it is through country that we explain our ancestral connections to place and philosophical views on creation’. ‘Country’ she said, ‘is thus not a monolithic term for Aboriginal people but a signifier replete with metaphorical references to belonging, connection, custodianship and political activism as well as the lyrical, rhythmic and melodic references to our memory’. See Bronwyn Carlson, ‘Striking the Right Cord: Indigenous people and the love of Country’, *Alternative* 12, no.5 (2016): 499.

<sup>337</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

themselves because as Aileen Blackburn stated, ‘that is what triggers everything else’.<sup>338</sup> She postulated that particular social and cultural practices generate the learning that occurs when Aboriginal women are on country. These are embodied experiences that include modalities of walking, working, storytelling and caring for country. For women, these practices connect them to a long and continued history of women’s custodianship of country and the importance and vitality of women’s cultural knowledge. Practices of ‘doing’ are vital actions that reaffirm their place within the interconnected world of Aboriginal country.

### **5.3 ‘Getting down and dirty’: History-work and ‘Women’s Work’**

Working on the AWAY project has helped participants to understand and make sense of their role as Aboriginal women and to connect them to the wider social and cultural life of the Aboriginal community on the far south coast. As one of the women exclaimed, ‘I did not know that women had women’s things before this. It was a big eye-opener for me’.<sup>339</sup> Laura-Jane Smith has explained that the real sense of heritage occurs when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged.<sup>340</sup> For these women a sense of self is an emotional and cognitive grappling with their place in the world but is also enacted and thought through via embodied practices, and through ‘actions and interactions’ that occur at Jigamy Farm and other yam regeneration sites, like Bondi Springs.<sup>341</sup> One participant explained the importance of labouring by explaining that ‘it is really what I want to do. I love the outdoors work and it is a

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>340</sup> Smith, *Uses of Heritage*, 2.

<sup>341</sup> Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, ‘The Promise of Non-Representational Theories’, *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 2.

traditional thing. We are trying to establish it back now. And I just love putting the hard work back into it. I enjoy it all. It just suits me good. I guess it suits us all'.<sup>342</sup> For this woman, her enjoyment stemmed from putting the 'hard work back into' Aboriginal cultural and social life; this is a way of re-establishing and maintaining the Aboriginal women's history of yams by *doing*.

Part of this process of history-making that occurs out on country and at Jigamy farm, is the negotiation of their cultural identity as Aboriginal women in contemporary settler Australia. This negotiation and reconceptualisation of Aboriginal women's cultural identity, which includes the reinscribing of important social and cultural roles, according to one participant, occurs when women and girls get 'down and dirty'. Indicating the specifics of gendered practices, another noted that when the construction of the propagation sheds was underway 'you had girls out here in their bare feet in mud'.<sup>343</sup> She deployed this observation to indicate how these practices of labouring in the soil and the mud might be seen as sitting outside traditional female behaviours. These women are revelling in gendered behaviours that have been deemed masculine by the dominant settler culture, where labouring in 'the dirt' is positioned as a male activity.<sup>344</sup>

For these women these practices of digging and walking, planting and watering but also building propagation sheds, laying cement, netting, cooking and eating yams, and putting

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<sup>342</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> In her 2015 study of women architects and builders, Jenny Pickerell found that across the case studies gender was a marker for dividing the capabilities and skill-sets of men and women. As she states, 'there was a stereotype prevalent that "men build homes and women make homes"'. See Jenny Pickerell, 'Bodies, building and bricks: Women architects and builders in eight eco-communities in Argentina, Britain, Spain, Thailand and USA', *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 22, no.7 (2015), 907.

their hands and feet in the dirt are all an essential part of sustaining and maintaining deep, historical connections to culture in the face of enduring settler colonisation that seeks its erasure. Through these actions they expressed a sense of self that is underpinned by the important role women played in nurturing native yams. As one of the women noted, '[building] was a really good experience, you got down and dirty... and we had inputs in that, we had inputs in everything that has been built here. It would not have been here without us'.<sup>345</sup> She highlighted the 'inputs' that they had in the building's construction and design but also how women's agency is reclaimed and reaffirmed through bodily activities that counter dominant gendered ideals. These are ideals that racialise Indigenous women's historical practice and deem specific activities and behaviours for Indigenous women acceptable, or unacceptable.

This young Aboriginal woman also pointed out the ways in which Aboriginal women had been left out of dominant forms of history-making and in particular practices of archiving, recording and the preservation of Aboriginal culture and artefacts. She indicated the ways in which western notions of gender have influenced Aboriginal women's participation in these fields. She expressed an active and engaged interest in these practices and stated that: 'I like Aboriginal culture and artefacts, I am all into that. I want to start doing surveys'. Yet she also noted that Aboriginal women have been overlooked in these roles by settler agencies that often privilege Indigenous men indicating that, 'they only have men doing it and they need women to do that side of it. Where is the women's side?'<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>346</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

Another woman explained that even though they may not have some of the formal qualifications that the male employees on the Bundian Way project possess, ‘we have the experience of doing’.<sup>347</sup> This experience of doing involves the ‘hard labour’ and physical skills required to build sheds and yam nurseries ‘from scratch’ but also everyday activities like cooking, eating and foraging. Women often perform these practices out on country on some of the significant yam regeneration sites on the Monaro. One of the Aboriginal women shared with me how Aileen Blackburn passed on some her cultural knowledge in these places. ‘If she finds something in the bush, she will call us over and have a little fossick around’.<sup>348</sup> Another woman explained how moving through country and fossicking yielded important new knowledge: ‘And we found an orchid there that’s like a rare orchid that not even the scientists know what it is’.<sup>349</sup> Preparing and eating the yams is also an ‘experience of doing’ that produces new knowledge about the Aboriginal past. One woman spoke of their experimentation with cooking yams:

they taste better on the coals. We have tried different ways. We had them cooked up in butter but that was very gluey. It had a rough taste. Starch, glue; it brought it all out. The one on the hot coals, you could taste it, it wasn’t starchy. I think the fire or the smoke had taken it out.<sup>350</sup>

These practices are part of a process of collective history-making that is also recovering technologies and knowledge through shared experimentation. Moreover, within the context of settler colonisation, the seemingly simple act of producing and consuming yams represents

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

a reaffirmation of Indigenous women's sovereignty. Through the shared practices of experimenting, cooking and eating, these Indigenous women are reasserting their power and social position, and they are reconstituting their sovereign role as powerful nurturers of human and non-human life through careful manipulation of an essential resource: food.<sup>351</sup>

Practices of foraging, discovery, experimentation and of cooking yams 'different ways' is a form of history-work that connects these women with a pre-colonial past where women communicated and maintained life-giving, gendered knowledge. As one woman explained about Aboriginal women's knowledge of yams:

it would give them energy and for medicinal purposes...I had no energy up on the top of Bondi and I ate a couple; I was ready to go, jumping over fences and all. I guess the Aboriginal women wouldn't have eaten them if they didn't give them nutrients. They weren't silly.<sup>352</sup>

The past that is accessed through practices of cooking and eating yams is contemporary and present-centred and connects their identity as young Aboriginal women in settler Australia with ancestral ways of being and doing that are life-affirming and assured. One of the women shared her experiences with the project with me stating that 'I have learnt a lot and that is exactly what I want to learn, about shared history, about Aboriginal culture, about this area more in particular, what has happened.... You get a good feeling out of it'.<sup>353</sup> This 'good

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<sup>351</sup> Carole M. Counihan, 'Food and Gender: Identity and Power', in *Food and Gender: Identity and Power*, eds. Carole M. Counihan and Steven L. Kaplan (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-11.

<sup>352</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.



feeling’ was also expressed as a sense of pride, ‘I am so proud of what we have done and how far we have come, and who we are to be Aboriginal’.<sup>354</sup>

For these women, preparing and eating native yams is a way of understanding and connecting with ancestral practices but also coming to an understanding of the value of Aboriginal women’s contributions to social and cultural life. This value has been diminished and disrupted by the incursions of settler colonisation, which include the impositions of an enforced patriarchal structure. The foregrounding of Indigenous men’s roles and contributions is part of heteropatriarchal settler structures that render invisible the roles women play within their families and communities. These roles are often diminished because they do not play out in the public sphere. Darlene Oxenham and Jill Milroy have suggested, ‘[A] lot of what women do often goes unrecognised or unnoticed because they work behind the scenes and do not always push themselves forward’.<sup>355</sup> Through preparing and consuming yams the women are also reflecting on women’s ancestral knowledge that enabled them to care for themselves, their family and their country. Aboriginal women past and present play an essential role in providing for their community. In the context of settler colonisation this role has been reduced to the domestic and private sphere. One of my non-Aboriginal respondents drew attention to this when he suggested that ‘a lot of people see Aboriginal women as mothers, and that is all’.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Darlene Oxenham and Jill Milroy, ‘Introduction’, in *Us Women, Our Ways, Our World*, eds. Pat Dugeon, Jeannie Herbert, Jill Milroy and Darlene Oxenham (Broome: Magabala Books, 2017), 13.

<sup>356</sup> Bundian Way Advisory Committee member, personal communication, September 30, 2015.

Western ideas of gender have had a particular impact on Aboriginal women. Aboriginal anthropologist, Marcia Langton has argued that an understanding of the ‘intersection of “race” and “gender” (as markers of difference)’ is vital to unravelling meanings attributed to Indigenous people by the dominant settler culture.<sup>357</sup> Viewed through the colonial prism of race and gender, Aboriginal women’s knowledge, and their contributions to the social and cultural life of communities, is marginalised and often erased; Aboriginal women are doubly oppressed by the discursive mechanisms of heteropatriarchy and settler colonisation. Stereotypical understandings of the gendered division of Aboriginal society arises from this paradigm; that Aboriginal societies are male dominated and Aboriginal women are subordinate in social life.<sup>358</sup> Aileen Blackburn stated that young Aboriginal women experience unique hardships in the face of an already complex and challenging world. She stressed the importance of the AWAY project as an initiative that can reconnect women with their culture in ways that can help build their identity outside of colonial paradigms.

Aileen Blackburn explained that for young Aboriginal women there is ‘not a lot of help anymore, because community has changed so much’.<sup>359</sup> She also explained that the yam, and also the practices that sustain it, are ‘great for their well-being. The importance of the yams is around their healing components, but healing has always been about well-being, about fitting in. They’re not alone in all this daunting struggle ahead, especially as young mums’.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Marcia Langton, *Well I heard on the Radio and Saw it on the Television* (Australian Film Commission, 1993), 45.

<sup>358</sup> Deborah Bird-Rose, ‘Land Rights and Deep Colonising: the erasure of women’, *Aboriginal Law Bulletin* 3/85 (1996): 8.

<sup>359</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid.

Aileen Blackburn drew attention to the difficulties that young Indigenous mothers face due to the changed nature of Indigenous parenting in settler colonial Australia. Settler colonisation's insistence on constructions of family that honour the individual and diminish the role of community has had a detrimental effect on some young Indigenous mothers who have become disconnected from important social and cultural supports. A history of child-removal and the denigration of Indigenous motherhood has also impacted on how young Indigenous mothers are understood and has invariably impacted on their ability to access support. Accessing mainstream support is often informed by the fear of punitive responses. Even though Indigenous women are often excluded from the roles that define western womanhood, Indigenous women have suffered the dominant settler misbelief that they are better off under the structures of western colonisation.<sup>361</sup> For some Indigenous women, this has rendered motherhood a 'daunting struggle'.<sup>362</sup>

Being on country and having the 'experience of doing' is enabling these young women to recuperate their sense of belonging as young mothers. Within the AWAY project, women's stories, histories, and cultural and social roles are highlighted and celebrated. In undertaking activities that reaffirm the vital role of women as carers and nurturers, young Indigenous women can reconnect to a social and cultural world that re-centres their gendered identity. Outside of gendered colonial paradigms, these women are building a sense of belonging that in Aileen Blackburn's terms, 'will be all they have'. This is a sense of belonging that is constantly negated by the gendered and racialised structures of settler colonisation.

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<sup>361</sup> Pat Dugeon, 'Mothers of Sin: Indigenous Women's Perception of Their Identity and Gender', in *Us Women, Our Ways, Our World*, eds. Pat Dugeon, Jeannie Herbert, Jill Milroy and Darlene Oxenham (Broome: Magbala Books, 2017), 109.

<sup>362</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

These young women highlighted to me the dislocations wrought by settler colonisation but more importantly the impacts of this on their sense of belonging. They did this by sharing with me a story of encounter. Tucked in around the fire at Jigamy Farm two women spoke in turn as they shared their experiences with me:

‘We had a spiritual encounter when we were there that was quite interesting and that is not the first time I heard it’

‘It wasn’t scary or anything and I think it was....’

‘Letting us know’.

‘It was actually kind of cool and beautiful to hear. You could hear like five or six women talking and it was just like singing, chanting and it was quite amazing’.

‘I think the ancestors were telling us something. That’s what I got out of it’.

‘It wasn’t a bad thing’.

‘I’m not crazy. It’s like a connection. I can definitely feel it’.

‘It sort of freaked me out a bit but I didn’t feel like I wasn’t supposed to be there it was more of a, ‘I’m here and you’re alright, it’s ok’. We are right to be on country’.<sup>363</sup>

I understood that these women took a risk sharing this story with me; a non-Indigenous researcher whose practice is grounded in secular traditions that often devalue and dismiss spiritual and intuitive ways of knowing. I think these women took this risk in an attempt to help me understand the importance, to them as contemporary Aboriginal women, of belonging. Continued acts of settler colonial dispossession had rendered these women out of

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<sup>363</sup> Aboriginal Employees (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

place in their own land. The diminishing value placed on Aboriginal women's knowledge and cultural practices by the dominant settler society had also created feelings of disconnection. Through this story, these women highlighted how a sense of belonging and connectedness is acquired through other women. It is part of a cycle of return that has circumvented the gendered dislocations of colonisation. It was important for these women to feel 'right' on country and to be assured that they belonged there. Because of continuing displacement and dispossession, these young women have had to reassess where they fit in the world, yet on that day in Bondi Springs, they heard 'five to six Aboriginal women' singing to them to reassure them that they were 'right to be on country'. Aileen Blackburn also reiterated this 'right' that is part of a long and enduring practice of history-making. She stated that country is a reassurance; it is, 'I know where I belong. I will go there'.<sup>364</sup>

#### **5.4 Webs of Connections: Places and their Pasts**

Knowing where you belong and having a place to go is an important counter to the dislocations and injuries of settler colonisation. British colonisation, with its incursion of sheep and settlers, impacted on Indigenous women's ability 'to meet their cultural obligations'.<sup>365</sup> That impact was compounded by the imposition of dominant settler ideas of gender which to this day continue to circumscribe the roles of Indigenous women, in ways different from men's experience. A return to place and a return to practices and ways of maintaining history is enabling new webs of connections that can foster a 'sense of belonging', which, according to Aileen, is vital to women's Aboriginal identity. As she has

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<sup>364</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

observed, because the women she has been working with have been returning regularly to yam sites on country:

they are able to go out in the bush and feel more comfortable and they are able to speak about it in terms of their identity and connection and their older people. I have noticed a change in their confidence and their ability to talk about that. That comes from being out on country and doing it.<sup>366</sup>

Aileen Blackburn further explained that through the yams project they are able to ‘express their identity and connection in ways that can help them... in a way that will improve the way they express what they want out of life’.<sup>367</sup> These women have been able to reconceptualise their identity as Aboriginal women outside of dominant gendered frameworks. They have been able to reclaim their agency and confidently rearticulate their role as women through material practices that reconnect them to a long and continued history of Aboriginal women caring for country and so caring for each other.

For Aileen Blackburn, ‘country’ is similarly a place to go, a temporal and spatial space in which to navigate a complex world:

Without that sense of belonging to deal with the challenges of life, that’s the importance of that connection to country. It’s a reassurance, that safety net. Look, if I fall, that’s ok you know, there will be someone to pick me up and I know where I belong. I will go there.<sup>368</sup>

Aileen Blackburn’s words have led me to think about how bodies in place act upon the world and are acted upon to generate understandings about the Aboriginal past. By (re)enacting certain cultural and social practices, Aboriginal women are generating a form of historical

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<sup>366</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

knowledge, particularly female knowledge that is deeply rooted in place. These are places significant to the nurturing and revitalisation of native yams, but also the nurturing and articulation of gendered identity, and are temporal and spatial sites where knowledge, practices and bodily movements come together and are intertwined. Historical Knowledge is informed and generated by bodily experiences where corporeal bodies interact with, act on, and interpret the world around them, generating proud new understandings of what it means to be a contemporary Aboriginal woman.

When that young Aboriginal woman explained the importance of the project, as ‘the yams have brought us together’ she was indicating how native yams have facilitated productive connections and relations between people. Here she ascribed agency to the yams, suggesting that they are a powerful instrument of togetherness. This coming together occurs via interactions between the human and non-human world that generates knowledge and understanding about specific places. The togetherness, belonging and interactions that unfold within the project are specific to Aboriginal women and imbue the landscape with meanings that speak to the centrality and importance of women in Aboriginal societies both past and present. Meanings accrue to places not through a narrowly focused human agency but through the ‘manifold of actions and interactions’ between people and places.<sup>369</sup> Deborah Bird-Rose uses the metaphor of webs to describe the way that place-centred stories tie in relationally around place suggesting that the ‘concept of return’ is at the heart of how Aboriginal people interact with and tell stories about places<sup>370</sup>. Of Jigamy Farm, one of the

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<sup>369</sup> Anderson and Harrison, ‘The Promise of Non-Representational Theories’, 2.

<sup>370</sup> Deborah Bird-Rose, ‘Writing Place’, in Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath (eds.) *Writing Histories: Imagination and Narration* (Monash University epress, 2009) n.p.

women explained that, ‘it kind of draws people in, it is a meeting spot here, everyone comes here, and a lot of people get interested. It’s like; what are you doing here?’<sup>371</sup> Jigamy Farm and the propagation sheds are a place of return, a ‘meeting-place’ that over time has accrued memories, stories and histories. These place-orientated narratives, and the practices that occur within them, have become part of the connective threads that tie these women together and facilitate their return to this place.

## 5.5 Conclusion

As Aileen Blackburn suggested with her ‘family album’ metaphor, the AWAY project and the history-work of Aboriginal women is helping to ‘build a story around the yams’.<sup>372</sup> This process of history-making is a dialogic one where histories and stories enacted in place are initiating ‘webs of connection’<sup>373</sup> that can foster the belonging that, according to Aileen, is fundamental to contemporary cultural identity, and in particular women’s cultural identity. Connections are drawn through these stories and practices of story-telling and ‘doing history’ that help to bring people and place together, in Aileen Blackburn’s words, ‘you get people, it’s like our own people from other places go ‘Ahh, my aunty, we do that, that’s what my aunts did back home up in the north coast’.<sup>374</sup> Telling stories generates memories that connect these women to places, and to each other.

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<sup>371</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>372</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>373</sup> Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese Historian in the Outback* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011), 89-94.

<sup>374</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart.



‘History through doing’ is happening in place, ‘out in the bush’ at Bondi Springs and at Jigamy Farm and is a vital part of how histories and stories about the yams are conceptualised and understood. Places are animated by the movement of bodies and the connections that are formed through memory. Bird-Rose wrote that the life of place occurs through the actions and interactions of ephemeral living beings, a study of place is also a study of relationships in motion.<sup>375</sup> As she proposed, a ‘study of place is also a study of relationships and motion’.<sup>376</sup> Within this formulation, the past is ‘present in the land, interactive in memory, and alive to the happenings of the present... the past lives in the present in vivid ways’.<sup>377</sup> Relationships and motion preface embodied practice and the meanings about space and place that they engender.<sup>378</sup> These approaches also privilege bodies and embodied practices, because the body is the medium through which we are involved in and interact with the world.

The Aboriginal past is understood and reconceptualised in the process of ‘doing history’ which is unfolding through Aboriginal women’s participation and contributions to the AWAY project. In this chapter, I have analysed the gendered dimensions of history-making on the Bundian Way and considered how the enmeshing of place and doing is producing new/old forms of belonging. I have suggested that history is maintained through embodied acts of remembering, through sharing stories and experiences and by enacting practices that reinscribe important social and cultural roles for Aboriginal women. These practices help to

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Feminist geographer of place, Doreen Massey explains that places are porous and are temporal as well as spatial; they are also based on a relational human and non-human agency. See Doreen Massey, ‘Places and their Pasts’, *History Workshop Journal* 39 (1995): 182- 192.

open up new spaces in which to re-negotiate circumscribed gendered identities and re-connect Aboriginal women to a long history of Aboriginal women's contributions to Aboriginal social and cultural life. This is facilitated by a rhythm of return, which has seen the women and Aileen Blackburn return to Jigamy Farm and to country, and maintain and tell stories for and about it, in ways that are embodied and emplaced. I have also argued, drawing on Aileen Blackburn's words, that the process of history-making unfolding through the AWAY project is a form of gender activism. Practices of 'doing history' have enabled these women to initiate a process of change that could enable them to live well in settler colonial Australia. In the next chapter, I consider the responses of a small group of non-Indigenous people who have engaged with Bundian Way projects. I argue that affect, and in particular a sense or feeling of loss, is one of the ways that some non-Indigenous people are attempting to grapple with the more honest histories communicated through the project.

## Chapter 6: ‘Feeling’ the Bundian Way

I didn’t see any Aboriginal people in the towns or in the bush or on the beaches where I often walked as a child. But I thought about them a lot. I thought about them especially when I was walking through the bush... in my mind’s eye the bush and shorelines, the wild riverbeds and the rocks, the hillsides and valleys were teeming with Aboriginal people.<sup>379</sup>

This is a childhood recollection of former resident of Eden, Jan Alexander, posted on her blog *Grey Area*. Alexander’s blog post was written in response to the unearthing of human remains on the beachfront near the Sapphire Sun Eco Village (still known as Shadracks Beach by most locals) south of Eden on the New South Wales far south coast in 2015. This is where Alexander spent her childhood during the 1950s and 60s and is a place where her family memories reside.<sup>380</sup> Alexander gave as her reason for writing the post her familial connection to the area, and to perhaps diffuse some of the conjecture about the identity of the human remains that their unearthing had generated. “Did my grandparents or great-grandparents know about them? Was it an unsolved murder? Apparently, there were bottles and jars dating back to the 1950s near the site where the bones were found”, she wrote.<sup>381</sup>

In her blog Alexander writes about the importance of this find and what it means to her understanding of Indigenous history in the area. For Alexander, these human remains, thought to pre-date European settlement, are proof of a deep Aboriginal past. Alexander also considers this emerging fact alongside her own childhood memories of Shadracks, which she

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<sup>379</sup> Jay Alexander, 2015, ‘No Bones About It’, *A Grey Area* (blog), July 5, 2015, <https://agreyarea.org/2015/07/10/no-bones-about-it/>

<sup>380</sup> Jay Alexander, ‘Family Memories of life at Shadracks Creek’, *Eden Magnet*, 2 September 2015, <http://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/3322811/family-memories-of-life-at-shadracks-creek/>.

<sup>381</sup> Alexander, ‘No Bones About It’.

explains were absent of Aboriginal people. In an attempt to counter this absence, she imagines Aboriginal people back into the landscape.

I start with Jay Alexander's stories because they address a theme that is central to the history-work undertaken by non-Indigenous people engaged with the Bundian Way project; a sense of loss. For Alexander that sense of loss is experienced through the act of recognition, of 'seeing' the deep Aboriginal past. Alexander's affective response is to evoke a memory of childhood where Aboriginal people feature as an absent-presence. Her sense of loss is ameliorated by imagining a landscape 'teeming with Aboriginal people'. This chapter explores feelings of loss and how they inform Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations on the Bundian Way. I contend that feelings of loss are central to how Aboriginal and settler pasts are understood in the present. More specifically, I argue that emotive configurations of loss expressed by settler people are also a fundamental part of the history-work undertaken by non-Indigenous visitors to the pathway. A sense of loss is often utilised as a way of thinking through the complexities of past worlds in a settler colonial context. Here I argue that the recognition of a 'deep Aboriginal past' instigated by encounters with Indigenous people and their pasts, produces particular affects. These affects often cluster around a sense of loss. For many of the non-Indigenous people that I spoke with for my research, history-work is also emotional work and is intrinsically tied to settler identity. Emotions arise in the recognition that settler identity is forged in the shadow of Indigenous dispossession and attempted erasure.

This chapter draws on the words and thoughts of thirty non-Indigenous people who had engaged with, or who had worked on, Bundian way projects. I conducted interviews with seventeen non-Indigenous people. Eight were high school teachers from a local high school who had been involved with Bundian Way activities at the school, such as staff development

days and other activities involving students. Two of the participants were interstate artists who had spent several days in 2015 visiting Bundian Way sites close to Eden and who had spent time speaking with Elders and activists about the project and the pathway. Three of my face-to-face interview participants were responsible for advising the LALC as part of the Bundian Way Advisory Committee. Thirteen participants were tertiary students and staff from the University of Wollongong's Bega campus who had attended a Bundian Way cultural tour and responded to my request to complete an online survey which I conducted on October 9, 2015. Four tertiary students who participated in a focus group for this research spent seven days at Jigamy Farm and parts of the Bundian Way as part of their tertiary studies at the Australian National University.

In this chapter I consider settler feelings of loss by drawing on the insights that my non-Indigenous participants generously shared with me. I also consider BJ Cruse's idea of Aboriginal loss later in this chapter. In public forums and in meetings with me, BJ Cruse has highlighted the damage wrought by dominant notions of Aboriginal deficit, that is, that Aboriginal people are in a perpetual state of loss. By reflecting on how loss might be considered differently, I draw on BJ Cruse's theory of care and how care might provide new and more productive ways of engaging with Aboriginal and settler pasts.

## **6.1 History-work as Emotional Work**

When I commenced my research in 2014, the Bundian Way project was in its early developmental stages. Many of my non-Aboriginal respondents were just starting to develop their knowledge and understanding about the pathway and its history as well as the Aboriginal and settler past more broadly. The Aboriginal and settler history of the pathway was being told and retold through local and national media, through public forums and by dissemination and sharing through social media platforms. Aboriginal Elders and activists

developing the Bundian Way were telling their stories and sharing their knowledge of the pathway with local and national news outlets and at public events, like annual NAIDOC day celebrations, as well as providing information about the project more broadly.<sup>382</sup> Non-Indigenous historian, John Blay released his publication *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way* in August 2015, which documented his journey through archives and ‘wilderness’ areas along the pathway to help relocate the Bundian Pass near Bombala. When I commenced interviews with my non-Aboriginal respondents, the local media were actively promoting Blay’s book alongside media releases from the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) communicating project updates. In 2014, at one of the local high schools, teaching staff were invited to participate in an end of year staff development day that included a Bundian Way cultural tour. The tour, which was led by local Indigenous guides, took in significant sites around Eden, including Cocora Beach and Quarantine Bay which make up part of the Bundian Way ‘Story Trail’. Some of the staff and students at the local high school were also involved with the construction of the pathway’s infrastructure, working with the LALC and local non-Indigenous and Indigenous builders on a part of the pathway near Pambula Lake at Jigamy Farm.

Many of my respondents heard Aboriginal and settler histories about the Bundian Way *in situ* through guided tours. All of my respondents had walked parts of the Bundian Way, mainly the coastal areas around Eden as part of cultural tours run by the Eden LALC; many had also undertaken walks on their own or with family and friends out of personal interest. All respondents to my research were keen to share their experiences with me. Of the thirty-six

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<sup>382</sup> For early interviews that communicated project developments including the pathway’s history see Bill Brown, ‘The Bundian Way Preserves and Shares Aboriginal Culture’, *ABC South East New South Wales*, 4 July 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/02/4017106.htm> Monica Tan, ‘The Bundian Way: ancient Aboriginal Trail, future great Australian bushwalk’, *The Guardian*, September 9, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/02/4017106.htm>

UOW staff and students who participated in the Bundian Way cultural tour in October 2015, close to half (thirteen) responded to my request to complete my online survey. I spoke about my research at a staff meeting at a local high school and passed around a sign-up sheet for those teaching staff interested in talking with me. My research and my request were met with enthusiasm by teaching staff even though they were aware that they would have to find time out of their busy day to speak with me. Many of my face-to-face interviews ran for over an hour as participants took time to consider what I had asked them and to carefully articulate their response, sometimes at length. My focus group session with four tertiary students at the ANU ran for one and a half hours, as students responded not only to my questions but also to the responses of their fellow students. One of my online survey participants expanded over 120 words to carefully communicate how participation in the Bundian Way cultural tour had made her feel.

In responding to my question about their understanding of local and Bundian Way history, over half of my non-Aboriginal respondents acknowledged that their developing knowledge was based on ‘read information’, or their engagement with historical monographs or other published histories.<sup>383</sup> One respondent stated that ‘I read Mark McKenna’s book (*Looking for Blackfella’s Point: An Aboriginal History of Place*). It was the lens through which I viewed all the subject matter that we encountered’.<sup>384</sup> Another suggested that ‘the Bundian Way is what you hear and what you see written down’.<sup>385</sup> For both, early engagements with the

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<sup>383</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 4, 2015, transcript NAP9.

<sup>384</sup> Non-Aboriginal/artist, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, October 15, 2015, transcript NAPFG2.

<sup>385</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 4, 2015, transcript NAP9.

Bundian Way were based on what they had read or what they had heard through the local media or through oral histories told on guided tours.

All my non-Aboriginal respondents claimed to have an awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal history beyond the local region, which they would draw on in an attempt to understand the Bundian Way project and its history. As one Bundian Way Advisory Committee member put it, 'I've got an understanding of Australian history generally but locally, probably not'.<sup>386</sup> Most respondents had a limited understanding of local history but could point to more generic national histories like the 1992 Mabo determination and the 1967 referendum, which have become part of national collective memory. Their sense of themselves as supporters of the Bundian Way project ensured that they were sympathetic to this history and were supportive of public history initiatives led by the local Aboriginal community. Understandings of local Aboriginal history were harder to grasp for some respondents who felt as though time spent in a place was tantamount to greater understanding. One respondent stated 'I have only been in the area for four years'.<sup>387</sup> Another respondent suggested that his knowledge was informed by the length of time that he had spent in the area, 'well, I have been enmeshed in it for a while. I have been here for over twenty-two years'.<sup>388</sup> Some indicated that their knowledge had been enhanced by face-to-face interactions with the Aboriginal community and friendships with individual Aboriginal people. These engagements had provided ways to connect with local Aboriginal history

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<sup>386</sup> Non-Aboriginal/BW Advisory Committee member, interview with Jodie Stewart, August 10, 2015, transcript NAP3.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.



outside of the abstract world of written histories. As one respondent explained when describing the impacts of these interactions, ‘I think it was like a real human connection. It was like; there is a real person and they’re telling a story’.<sup>389</sup>

The pasts that my respondents drew upon to communicate their understanding were informed by a combination of personal and collective memory which often resulted in the fashioning of histories that ranged from the deeply personal to the generic and abstract. A teacher from a local high school spoke to me about his family history in the area. When we sat down together, he commenced our interview by sharing with me the story of his family and their connection to gold-mining in the area. He felt connected to the place where he lived and worked because of his family history, ‘So we’ve got very long term, few generations, and a few distant cousins down here. So very family related. That is what keeps bringing me back’.<sup>390</sup> For this local teacher, history was personal and the local history of gold mining, where his family played a significant role, created a mnemonic anchor that tethered him to that place. Not all of my respondents talked about family or family connections but close to half of my face-to-face interviewees spoke about ‘ancestors’ who they assumed had been responsible for Aboriginal dispossession. Responsibility for settler wrong-doing was often acknowledged but also safely deferred to ‘ancestors’.<sup>391</sup>

Walking the pathway with Indigenous guides and visiting Bundian Way sites precipitated encounters with Aboriginal pasts that were more immediate and experiential and moved

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<sup>389</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>390</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 13, 2015, transcript NAP12.

<sup>391</sup> Mark McKenna, ‘Blackfellas’ Point: One Decade later’, *The Monthly*, August 5, 2014, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/blog/mark-mckenna/2014/05/2014/1407185637/blackfellas-point-one-decade-later>

beyond the abstract world of words, which is often the place where non-Indigenous people encounter Aboriginal pasts. As one survey respondent put it, the experience was ‘[E]nlightening. Good to translate readings into reality’.<sup>392</sup> Their knowledge was developing but was also informed by emotions that had shaped their understandings in various ways. Knowing and not knowing about the Bundian Way in particular, and the settler and Aboriginal past more broadly, had generated a tangle of emotions.

## **6.2 Feeling the Settler and Aboriginal Past**

‘I would say that I learned a lot, but I also *felt* a lot, which I think was just as important’.<sup>393</sup> This was a response given to an online survey question that asked non-Aboriginal respondents to comment on their understanding of local Aboriginal and settler history. This respondent was commenting on a cultural tour of the Bundian Way she had attended in October 2015. They had spent a morning listening to three Aboriginal men, Elders and activists working on the project, who spoke about their experiences growing up in settler Australia. These men also shared historical stories about Aboriginal and European histories of the pathway as well as local Aboriginal involvement in European industries like whaling. These histories and personal stories were communicated to attendees in intimate groups of about six-eight people at Jigamy Farm, as well as along the Story Trail that stretches between Cocora Beach and Quarantine Bay south of Eden. This respondent was commenting on her experience as a tour attendee after the event. She reflected on what learning ‘a lot’ but also not knowing enough had made her feel, she wrote, ‘I learned how the Yuin people helped

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<sup>392</sup> Tour attendee, ‘UOW Bega, BW Cultural tour’, online survey, *Survey Monkey Inc.*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>393</sup> Tour attendee, ‘UOW Bega, BW Cultural tour’, online survey, *Survey Monkey Inc.*, October 9, 2015.

during the whaling period. But despite the knowledge gained I would not feel comfortable identifying myself as knowledgeable in the area of the shared history of the local area'.<sup>394</sup> For this respondent 'not feel[ing] comfortable' was an emotional response to not knowing enough. This survey participant gave equal importance to what she felt as well as what she had learnt by way of shared stories and histories. Through engagements with the Bundian Way project the knowing subject had also become the feeling subject.

This survey participant's discomfort in not knowing enough about local Indigenous history is perhaps underpinned by the social expectation that she should know more. The era of the 'great Australian silence' that William Stanner referred to in his 1968 Boyer Lectures no longer applies to contemporary understandings of the Aboriginal and settler past. Stanner was referring to a dominant set of practices of silencing on a national scale.<sup>395</sup> While silences still exist and silencing still occurs, the work of historians and Aboriginal activists has ensured greater prominence of Aboriginal voices in the public sphere. Legislative and policy changes in subsequent decades, which included the Whitlam-era Aboriginal self-determination policies, the 1992 Mabo judgement and 1996 Wik decision, also impacted on national understandings of Australia history. As Anna Clark has argued, much of Mabo's significance lay in the way it registered a wider reconceptualisation of Australian history, even impacting on debates surrounding school curricula.<sup>396</sup> One of my respondents, an interstate artist visiting Bundian Way sites, spoke of being influenced by these political and social forces,

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<sup>394</sup> Tour attendee, 'UOW Bega, BW Cultural Tour', online Survey, *Survey Monkey Inc.*, October 9, 2015.

<sup>395</sup> William Stanner, 'After the Dreaming', *The 1968 Boyer Lectures*, ABC broadcasting commission, 1969.

<sup>396</sup> Anna Clark, *Teaching the Nation: Politics and Pedagogy in Australia History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2006), 40.

stating that ‘Native Title... I had a whole history as a whitefella trying to advocate’.<sup>397</sup> Here she reflects on how her activism as a white person was influenced by Mabo but perhaps also indicates how progressive ‘whitefella’ history is informed by these major events in national settler and Aboriginal politics. Over half of my respondents expressed an understanding of local Aboriginal history and culture based on public debates and wider political and social developments around the issues of Aboriginal land rights and social justice. Another local teacher reflected upon how she speaks to others, including students, about local Aboriginal history; she stated ‘so I tell stories... about my ancestry and history and talk about that in terms of the genocide that happened in the area where I grew up’.<sup>398</sup> This local teacher said that she felt that it was important to tell familial stories within the context of wider national and localised debates around attempted Aboriginal ‘genocide’.<sup>399</sup> She also linked her own personal history to these practices, indicating her understanding of past settler violence and its connection to contemporary peoples.

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<sup>397</sup> Non-Aboriginal/ artist, focus group Interview with Jodie Stewart, October 15, 2015, transcript NAPFG2.

<sup>398</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.



Figure 6.1: *Tour guide, Les Kosez, explained the Indigenous significance of Twofold Bay on the UOW, Bundian Way cultural tour.*

Knowing and not knowing are part of emotional practices that reproduce my respondents as feeling subjects. Acknowledging that they did not know, or that their knowledge was limited, often induced feelings of frustration, guilt and even anger. In this context, intellect and feeling are intimately connected. An interstate artist stated that she ‘devoured’ McKenna’s *Looking for Blackfella’s Point*, so indicating not only her appetite for Aboriginal history but

how, for her, the acquisition of this type of knowledge involves emotional-work.<sup>400</sup> One of the ANU students, a middle-aged woman, expressed anger and frustration directed toward an education system and social world that had denied her access to alternative pasts. During a focus group session with other creative art students she emphatically articulated a *lost* opportunity, ‘I think it has actually been a deliberate thing, and I feel really ripped off. And I come away feeling angry that I had this huge area missing from my education’.<sup>401</sup> Others in the focus group expressed a sense of loss in having an early education that did not include Aboriginal histories and perspectives. A young student acknowledged that ‘we were not really taught in school’.<sup>402</sup> Another middle-aged student stated that ‘it was not made available’.<sup>403</sup> The same middle-aged student who expressed anger over significant gaps in her education further explained how being educated and receiving a good education did not ensure that the gaps in her knowledge would be filled; ‘of sophisticated ways of living on the land, I can’t believe I did not know that, I was so shocked. I am not an uneducated person, and yet I did not know that’.<sup>404</sup>

Two respondents to my online survey expressed a strong, sometimes urgent desire to *know* more. One university staff member commented, ‘I had a huge void in my knowledge and understanding of an area that I moved to because I loved it geographically. Now I don’t feel a void but instead an appetite to keep learning and developing knowledge’.<sup>405</sup> For this

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<sup>400</sup> Non-Aboriginal/artist, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, October 15, 2015, transcript NAPF2.

<sup>401</sup> Non-Aboriginal student, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, September 2, 2015 transcript NAPFG1.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Tour attendee, ‘UOW Bega, BW Cultural Tour’, online Survey, *Survey Monkey Inc.*, October 9, 2015.

respondent, a perceived gap in her knowledge was filled not by more knowledge but by a desire and ‘an appetite’ to learn more and develop her knowledge about local Aboriginal and history and culture. Like the interstate artist who ‘devoured’ a book on local Aboriginal history, this university staff member was indicating how knowledge acquisition involves strong feelings. While the interstate artist sated her appetite by ‘devouring’ new knowledge about Aboriginal history, the university staff member had acquired a hunger for more knowledge. Another survey participant, a mature-aged tertiary student, indicated her disbelief when confronted by others who were apathetic toward attending Bundian Way events and learning more about Aboriginal people and their history. She wrote that, ‘when I told workmates about the day, most people just looked at me blankly and asked why I would want to learn about the Aboriginal experience and history of the area. I can’t understand why you wouldn’t want to know’.<sup>406</sup> For these respondents, to not know is to be complicit in the process of silencing. But most importantly to not know, or not want to know, is to stymie one’s development as a feeling subject.

However, choosing not to know was also employed by some respondents to protect them from the pain of remembering. When I interviewed a local high school teacher, questions about the Aboriginal and settler past were the hardest questions for her to answer. The teacher’s pain was informed by her memory of past wrongs but also by the process of remembering, which she told me was often hard and traumatic. When I asked her about the Aboriginal and settler history of the pathway she paused and looked off into the distant playing field before stating, ‘I find it hard to come to terms with my ancestors and embrace my own ancestors, so I have always been not really interested in my history in this country. I

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<sup>406</sup> Tour attendee, ‘UOW Bega, BW Cultural Tour’, online Survey, *Survey Monkey Inc.*, October 9, 2015.

know a lot of white people are, but I have never been overly interested, and I think that is changing a bit'.<sup>407</sup> Pain is often thought of as a sensation rather than an emotion, but the pain that some settler Australians feel when confronted with the injustices of settler colonisation is often linked to memory and a 'retrospective intentionality', where pain often slides into negative feelings.<sup>408</sup> For this high school teacher, the pain of remembering found expression in a wilful forgetting or a form of pain expressed as a hardship that was directed toward the act of remembering. As Sara Ahmed explains, 'in attributing pain to something, we generate that very thing, as an object of thought as well as feeling'.<sup>409</sup> The practice of remembering was hard and painful for this respondent but had also prompted her to initiate a process of change. One of the non-Indigenous Bundian Way Advisory Committee members expressed the pain of remembering as a call to act. She stated that, 'it's almost my karma: this is what I've got to do. Because I know that on my dad's side we were farmers... I read stories of what happened out there and I think, right'.<sup>410</sup> This committee member expressed a desire to right the wrongs of the past, to fix the social world of contemporary Aboriginal Australia that her ancestors and, by extension, she was responsible for. Another non-Indigenous Bundian Way Advisory Committee member also indicated her desire to right alleged wrongs: 'I think that white people have done horrible, enormous damage, and we could never repay what we need to repay. So, in some kind of way I am working on this as a kind of personal

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<sup>407</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>408</sup> Sara Ahmed, 'The Politics of Bad Feeling', *Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association Journal* 1 (2005): 73.

<sup>409</sup> Ahmed, 'The Politics of Bad Feeling', 73.

<sup>410</sup> Non-Aboriginal/BW Advisory Committee member, interview with Jodie Stewart, October 27, 2015, transcript NAP4.



repayment.’<sup>411</sup> At the end of our interview the Advisory Committee member returned to her personal motivations:

I feel that when I first bought the land I had to have a bit of a wrestle with my head. Me actually buying land off a white person who bought it off another white person who had probably squatted on it and never owned it anyway. And it was a bit of a tussle really. I thought, if it came to the crunch and I was approached by the Aboriginal community who said, ‘no we own that land’ then I would have to say, ‘ok then you can have it back.’<sup>412</sup>

For this respondent, her acquisition of land through the mechanisms of settler law had generated a feeling of unease. The understanding that she was living on stolen land had prompted her to think deeply about her own legitimacy as a landowner in settler Australia. To offer to relinquish this land was her way of reconciling her feelings with the fact of Indigenous dispossession. Here both committee members linked the knowledge of past injustice with a personal obligation to right the remembered wrong of Indigenous dispossession and settler violence.

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<sup>411</sup> Non-Aboriginal/BW Advisory Committee member, interview with Jodie Stewart, May 5, 2016, transcript NAP14.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.



Figure 6.2: *An Indigenous guide walks tour attendee along the Bundian Way 'Story Trail'. April 4 2016.*

The pain of remembering for both of my respondents was linked to feelings of shame or feeling bad about the past. Feeling bad about the past generated in them a strong desire to act. Both my respondents expressed deep connections to the places that they inhabited either through family history or the purchasing of another's land. Both carefully acknowledged how history, in this case the past actions of settler peoples, had structured their actions in the present. They paid close attention to the ways in which this history of dispossession had

influenced their own subjectivity, particularly as a settler subject who acts against injustice. Acting was a way of fixing the self. For both my respondents, settler identity (selfhood) was produced by the actions of farmers or squatters who, in this case, were viewed as symbols of dispossession. These settler landowners were seen as the original perpetrators of past injustice and settler violence and this was manifested in the respondents' sense of self and defined their identity as settler people. Non-Aboriginal historian, Clare Land, explains in terms of the power dynamics that structure contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interactions, that 'the state is understood as existing within the self, not just outside of and imposed on its critics'.<sup>413</sup> Land suggests that settler people bring with them over two hundred years of colonising history that informs present interactions.<sup>414</sup> That the state 'exists within the self' helps to explain the ways in which settler behaviours and interactions are mediated and informed.

For two of my respondents thinking about settler and Aboriginal pasts also meant managing and regulating their own behaviours that were perceived as potentially harmful to present Aboriginal people. Reflecting on his seven days spent at Jigamy Farm as part of his studies at ANU one young creative art student stated:

I walked the area and started to get a sense of the geography... and I built a shelter that day and slept in it for a week. I looked back on that and thought how kind of very colonial. Not only did I enter the

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<sup>413</sup> Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles*, (London: Zedbooks ltd., 2015), 132.

<sup>414</sup> Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity*, 133.

campground, I camped on top of a hill overlooking the campground in this structure that was twice the size of my ego.<sup>415</sup>

Another of my respondents, a local high school teacher, also reflected on her relationship to place: ‘we collected sticks and built little cubbies and shacks and joined them altogether... looking back I thought that really epitomises my relationship with my environment. I mould it and manipulate it. It suddenly felt a bit like colonisation’.<sup>416</sup> As Emma Koval has suggested, within the norms of white anti-racism, whiteness is associated with a host of negative characteristics like colonisation, exploitation and imperialism.<sup>417</sup> In the case of these respondents, colonisation was a set of negative behaviours and culturally-informed actions that needed to be minimised and avoided. To think about settler and Aboriginal pasts was to feel anxious about practices and behaviours that rendered their whiteness visible and could be potentially injurious, even a reproduction of colonial domination.

My two respondents were clearly troubled by pernicious colonial manipulations of the natural world. For them, collecting sticks, building cubbies and shacks or erecting your sleeping quarters on the highest hill seemed a form of colonial manipulation. Here the environment was viewed as space that could be moulded and shaped but probably should not be, especially if the agent of change is non-Indigenous. The local high school teacher in our interview together went on to explain what a more productive relationship with the environment might look like: ‘I noticed how rare it is for me to go and sit and be still in nature; to really take notice of the subtleties, to really listen, to notice I am part of it. I am the

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<sup>415</sup> Non-Aboriginal student, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, September 2, 2015, transcript NAPFG1.

<sup>416</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>417</sup> Emma Koval, *Trapped in the Gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia* (Berghahn Books, 2015), 134.

natural world, just as much as the tree is'.<sup>418</sup> For her 'being still' and 'listening' was less injurious than being industrious or in this case 'collecting sticks' and 'building cubbies'. As she stated about settler society, 'I think our society is so focussed on speed, progress, economics that it is hard for us to sit still and listen to or notice our environment'.<sup>419</sup>

There is an aspect of 'wilderness thinking' at play here.<sup>420</sup> Many scholars have examined and deconstructed the concept of wilderness, arguing that it enforces a separation of nature and culture.<sup>421</sup> For my respondent, 'still' nature or being still in nature because you are the 'natural world', opposed an industrious 'culture' of colonisation. Indigenous people were also represented as being closer to 'nature'. She stated, 'just the way they watched the environment... that kind of attentiveness to the natural world'. Many Indigenous commentators have argued that this way of thinking about place, as 'wilderness', has been part of the continual dispossession of Indigenous people. As Bundjalung woman, Fabienne Bayet-Charlton argued 'the doctrine of terra nullius lives on under the conceptual banner of wilderness: a land without human interaction or impact'.<sup>422</sup> Rather than reaffirming terra nullius that some scholars have suggested is embedded in such ideas of 'wilderness', my respondent acknowledged a long history of Indigenous care and curatorship of country. 'So

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<sup>418</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>419</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>420</sup> Jessica Weir, *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners* (Aboriginal Studies Press, 2009), 32.

<sup>421</sup> For example see William Cronon 'The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature', *Environmental History* 1, no.1 (1996):7-28 and Val Plumwood, 'The Concept of Cultural Landscape: Nature, Culture and the Agency of Land', *Ethics & The Environment* 11, no.2 (2006):115-150.

<sup>422</sup> Fabienne Bayet-Charlton, 'Overturning the Doctrine: Indigenous Peoples and Wilderness -Being Aboriginal in the Environmental movement', in *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, ed. M. Grossman (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 174. For further Indigenous commentary on the concept of wilderness see Marcia Langton, 'What do we mean by wilderness? Wilderness and Terra Nullis in Australian Art', *The Sydney Papers* 8, no.1 (1996):10-31.

they knew what was happening in the ocean by what was happening in the bush, is kinda cool'. Yet for this respondent, alongside this acknowledgement was the desire for a pre-colonial landscape which is often imagined as space uncorrupted by the sin of invasion.

For some of my respondents, engagements with the Bundian Way project prompted a thinking about whiteness; in particular the 'weirdness' and feelings of shame that an acknowledgement of whiteness can produce. As one of the local school teachers put it:

we've all got hangover feelings and no matter how much you think it is in the past we all experience these feelings every day because the reality is we all live here on land that is stolen, and that has never ever been addressed and so there is weirdness around that. We have all inherited weirdness around that.

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For my respondent, feelings of shame and 'weirdness' evoked a past both personally situated and socially produced. She also drew attention to how shame can be an emotional inheritance that is passed from one generation to the next due to wilful forgetting. This emotional inheritance also connected the local high school teacher to the wider settler community. This is reflected in her response that conflated her personal history and identity with that of a wider cultural group, that of 'white Australia'. She suggested that 'we haven't really grasped yet how much this means for us personally, the significance this has for white Australians'.<sup>424</sup> In addressing the concept of 'ancestral shame' Elspeth Probyn evokes Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome to suggest that, 'our relating to past emotions and affects moves rhizomatically; travelling along familial lines, it sparks off shoots'.<sup>425</sup> The local high school

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<sup>423</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid.

<sup>425</sup> Elspeth Probyn, 'Ancestral Shame', *Blush: Faces of Shame* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2005), 110.

teacher's ability to move between the personal and communal suggests how 'sparks' of shame 'travel along familial lines' but also connect her to a wider rhizomatic group, that of the shameful white nation.

This ancestral shame as emotional inheritance was also linked to notions of settler belonging and how to place that belonging alongside, or within, Aboriginal sovereignty.<sup>426</sup> Thinking through settler belonging was an emotional practice that formed part of deeply personal investments in understanding where individuals fit within the intergenerational schema of 'belonging' and how that has shaped their subjectivity as good white people. As one local high school teacher put it, 'for me it is a personal thing'.<sup>427</sup> For such respondents their understanding of what it meant to 'belong' was informed by the concept of a 'deep Aboriginal past' and 'deep time', two concepts that have come to inform public understanding about the history of the continent and its first inhabitants. The discovery of human remains dating back 40,000 years in Lake Mungo in the late 1960s fundamentally changed understandings of Australian history. Environmental historian Tom Griffiths also explains that because of this and other important research many Australians are much more conscious of human and non-human history.<sup>428</sup> Most respondents took care to acknowledge that Aboriginal people were the original descendants whose connection to the continent stretches back at least 40,000 years. Their understanding was also reinforced by engagements

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<sup>426</sup> Other scholars have also examined individual conceptions of settler belonging looking carefully at attempts by some non-Indigenous people to grapple with and understand their place within Aboriginal sovereignty. For example see Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Deborah Bird-Rose, 'Love and Reconciliation in the Forest', *Reports from a Wild Country: ethics for decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004), 193-212.

<sup>427</sup> Non-Aboriginal/creative art student, focus group interview with the Jodie Stewart, September 2, 2015, transcript NAPFG1.

<sup>428</sup> Tom Griffiths, 'Deep Time and Australian History', *History Today* 51, no. 11 (2001): 25.

with some Aboriginal Elders and activists working on the Bundian Way project. One interstate artist recalled BJ Cruse asking an assembled tour group ‘where is your country?’ which prompted them to ponder ‘where do I feel right?’; ‘Is it where you are born or where you are located?’<sup>429</sup>

For the focus group students, ideas of belonging were caught up in understandings of Aboriginal antiquity, place and family, and what it means to dwell and put down roots in country with a deep Aboriginal past. One student explained the problematics of belonging for settler Australians by recourse to her own experience visiting her ancestral lands in Scotland:

It really felt amazing. And when I read... one person had said, made the observation, that we live in Australia and some of us have seven or eight generations. That’s a long time. But we do not have thousands of generations of ancestors existing in this land. When I went back to the land where thousands of generations of my ancestors lived, I reckon I felt it.<sup>430</sup>

For this respondent, who valued her Scottish ancestry, ‘home’ was predicated on a deep intergenerational connection but also based on understandings around Aboriginal custodianship of land and notions of a deep Aboriginal past. Feelings of belonging were informed by being able to empathise with Aboriginal Australia, to perhaps feel the same sorts of connections to place that Aboriginal people feel which have been built up over many millennia of dwelling in place. This respondent asked in a rhetorical fashion, ‘so is that the difference between what we feel and they feel?’<sup>431</sup> Here there is a slippage between ‘feeling bad’ or ‘feeling for Aboriginal people’ and expressing common feelings. This respondent was

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<sup>429</sup> Non-Aboriginal/artist, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, October 15, 2015, transcript NAPFG2.

<sup>430</sup> Non-Aboriginal student, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, September 2, 2015, transcript NAPFG1.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.



grappling with how to potentially harmonise Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal narratives of place but expressed an apparent discomfort with identifying her own feelings with that of Aboriginal people. Her rhetorical question mirrors Probyn's urgent question about historical empathy: '[H]ow do we represent these transethnic relations in ways that neither deny accountability nor obscure difference through overidentification?'<sup>432</sup> This question influenced my respondent's thinking and impacted on her ability to create affective relations with people and place through empathising with Aboriginal people.

Common feelings were also formed by the students who linked their imagined and real feelings of 'ancestral belonging' to the complexities of contemporary Aboriginal identity.

One stated:

I talked to [two Aboriginal mentors] about this exact same thing in myself, of not feeling that there was anywhere that was particularly home, and I was saying going to Scotland and feeling some kind of connection... They were fascinated because [one of the Aboriginal mentors] has Scottish ancestry so he wants to go back and see if he feels that connection. He said, 'it's not about your blood'. Although it can be, if you feel. If you choose where ever you are to be your home then you can gain that connection.<sup>433</sup>

For this respondent, the Aboriginal mentor's acknowledgment of his Scottish heritage as an Aboriginal man provided new ideas of 'home' and how to belong. The complexity of this man's Aboriginal identity was used as a counterpoint to argue for the importance of a form of settler belonging, not defined by 'blood' but by 'feeling' and the choice one makes to 'feel at home' in a particular place. A 'common feeling' between the mentor and my respondent was

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<sup>432</sup> Probyn, 'Ancestral Shame', 124.

<sup>433</sup> Non-Aboriginal/creative art student, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, September 2, 2015, transcript NAPFG1.

used to think through the complexities of belonging in settler Australia. An Aboriginal man's ability to 'feel' a connection to a different place, one that she identified with, demonstrated to her the power of 'common feeling' as a foundation for belonging. She went on:

Since he said that, I changed my perspective about what is home for me, and I felt much more of a connection to Canberra where I am choosing to live. And I am making a conscious effort to go out into the bush in Canberra and look at the trees here like I did on the Bundian Way. If this is where I choose to live, I want that sense of connection to my home right now.<sup>434</sup>

For this respondent belonging was inextricably tied to 'feeling at home' and 'feeling place', which included engaging the senses. Was she able to 'look at the trees here (in Canberra) like (she) did on the Bundian Way'? It was also tied to an Aboriginal sense of place where 'looking' and 'feeling' in ways that could engender deeper connections, was prefaced on what might be called authentic Aboriginality and authentic Aboriginal spaces that were located in the bush and along the Bundian Way.

For some of the students, authentic belonging which could counteract the destructiveness and apathy of dominant settler practices, was founded on supposedly 'traditional' expressions of Aboriginality that created strong bonds between people and place. The students understood that dominant settler practices of connecting with place had been destructive and unproductive. One respondent suggested that 'our practices are damaging the landscape'.<sup>435</sup> For some of the students and some of my other respondents, authentic Indigenous belonging was defined as communities who had maintained traditional practices along a continuous generational line and who had not encountered the loss and degradation that east coast

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

communities had suffered because of their protracted exposure to settler colonisation. These communities were seen as being located in the central desert areas or the top end of the Northern Territory, often supposed to be the place where authentic Aboriginality resides.

One student in the focus group was able to feel connections to place because the place that she called 'home' was home to an Aboriginal community that had maintained close cultural and spiritual links to land and people through what she called 'strong' cultural practices. She stated, 'Alice Springs, I still call that my home... partly I think because the land is still sung, culture is still really strong, language is strong, traditions are strong. For me, that land, it sings to me'.<sup>436</sup> Again, a sense of belonging was tied to Aboriginal connectedness to land, but also the notion of authentic Aboriginality that includes 'strong' traditions and 'ceremony'. As she put it, 'there is a continuity of culture there that is still really strong, the knowledge. In Eden... there is no ceremony because they have lost the ceremony'.<sup>437</sup>

In this context, the notion of an authentic Indigenous culture was inexplicably linked to feelings of loss. As flagged in my introduction, ideas of loss permeated discussion about the settler and Aboriginal past. There was the understanding among many of my respondents that 'much has been lost' in terms of language and culture, but projects like the Bundian Way are important and vital for addressing and countering this loss. This understanding was caught up in practices of grief; one respondent stating that 'I guess for me there was that... sadness of the knowledge that has been lost'.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

For many non-Aboriginal respondents in particular, loss was a feeling that might lead to an act of searching and a sometimes visceral response to loss, of not being able to locate what is assumed to be unrecoverable that may include pristine wilderness and pre-contact Indigenous people. I commenced this chapter with blogger Jan Alexander's conjuring of Indigenous people in her 'minds-eye'. Her conjuring is an attempt to locate some allegedly lost peoples even when she assumes that they are no longer bodily present. For my respondents, loss was sometimes used as a term to describe and define Indigenous culture on the south coast. Losing culture was seen as an action perpetrated by early settlers with the effects of this loss reverberating through time and space. Loss as a way of talking about Indigenous people and culture also fed into a broader discourse of Aboriginal deficit, that local Indigenous people are lacking the accoutrements and attributes of 'authentic' indigeneity.

Visceral confrontations with loss produced profound effects. When discussing student responses to the workshops, one interstate artist stated:

I observed that 'ah ha! moment... where they (students) asked a question of (Aboriginal guides) or somebody local and the question could not be answered because of the loss, the loss of knowledge. That was really profound... to hear that and experience it first-hand.<sup>439</sup>

'First-hand' experiences of loss were significant because they revealed the extent of settler colonial practices. These were practices my respondents understood that, to some extent, they were implicated in. Whilst for this respondent the impacts of settler colonisation were made manifest by the physical presence of Aboriginal others, contemporary Indigenous people

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<sup>439</sup> Non-Aboriginal/artist, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, October 15, 2015, transcript NAFG2.

were also seen to embody the loss that settlers articulate through their longing for a *lost* indigeneity.

The acknowledgment of loss by Indigenous people was not expressed as a quiet resignation. Rather, the Bundian Way project was understood by many as an initiative that could help to reclaim and culturally revalidate Indigenous space and the practices they sustained. Often loss is viewed via what remains. As Ossie Cruse stated, ‘some things can never be erased, like kinship connections’.<sup>440</sup> The loss expressed by non-Indigenous people was tied to their subjectivity as ‘settler people’ and an acknowledgement of their complicity in the settler colonial project. It became apparent through my careful reading of their responses that this sense of themselves and their descendants as agents of colonisation was driving their engagement with Aboriginal and settler pasts on the Bundian Way. For non-Indigenous people, loss became entangled with a range of emotions including guilt, shame, grief and sorrow. These emotions were often marshalled to help them think through complex and painful pasts but also to help situate themselves within the settler colonial present.

My non-Indigenous, ‘settler’ respondents expressed loss in various ways: culture that is lost and an ‘ah ha! moment’ when that loss is understood; lost opportunities when the settler education system denies you access to more honest pasts; being at a loss and searching for ways to make recompense for the horrors of the past; and settler understandings that position Indigenous people as being the embodiment of cultural deficit. Many of my non-Indigenous, settler participants were working through feelings of loss in order to situate themselves within a complex and challenging settler colonial present. For many of my non-Indigenous

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<sup>440</sup> Ossie Cruse, interviewed by Bill Brown, ‘The Bundian Way Preserves and Shares Aboriginal Culture’, *ABC South East New South Wales*, 4 July 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/02/4017106.htm>

participants, feelings of loss informed what it meant to be a settler Australian and how to (un)belong in settler colonial Australia.

### **6.3 Loss and Settler Identity: Situating an Ethics of Care**

The non-Aboriginal people I interviewed were all progressive settler people and expressed goodwill toward Aboriginal people. Anthropologist Emma Koval has undertaken research on non-Indigenous people of goodwill, identifying and attempting to understand ‘the intense identity’ work that informs Indigenous and non-Indigenous politics.<sup>441</sup> Koval’s research revealed the complexity of ‘racialised identities’ and the efforts expended to create and maintain them. As she contends, ‘[F]or non-Indigenous people, this meant maintaining a specific racial identity as a ‘good’ white person and not an ignorant, exploitative, ‘racist’’,<sup>442</sup> Many scholars have examined the concept of ‘white identity’ and how it comes to shape cross-cultural relations. Central to much of this scholarship is the ethics of whiteness or how being white is constituted in the act of doing good.<sup>443</sup> In settler colonial contexts, an encounter with Indigenous people can result in the deployment of specific moral codes and behaviours that position the white subject as ‘good’ and moral. Koval argues this is part of the process of maintaining specific racialised identities, of the ‘white anti-racist’.

Koval’s notion of maintaining specific racialised identities is pertinent to my research as many of the participants responded to the histories communicated through the project by

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<sup>441</sup> See Emma Koval, ‘The Culture of White Anti-Racism’, *Trapped in the Gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia* (Berghahn Books, 2015), 31-56, and ‘Preface’, x-xv.

<sup>442</sup> Koval, ‘Trapped in the Gap’, xiv.

<sup>443</sup> See Barbara Heron, *Desire for Development: Whiteness, Gender and the Helping Imperative* (Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2007) and Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011).

thinking through their own role in the settler colonial project. This included the articulation of an ‘anti-racist’ stance but also an emotive grappling with past injustices of which they considered themselves having played a part. The majority of those I interviewed, myself included, would consider themselves allied to Indigenous causes and welcomed the Bundian Way project. From within the wider non-Aboriginal community there has been a groundswell of support for the project and very little opposition.<sup>444</sup> Yet many of the non-Aboriginal people who I interviewed told me that they were challenged and sometimes paralysed by the history of Aboriginal and settler relations that they understand as violent and traumatic. They were very aware that this history has had a long and enduring impact on Aboriginal people. Many of my respondents reflected deeply on this past, an often-painful process that resulted in feelings of anxiety, guilt and shame. This emotional reflection did not culminate in outward displays of jingoistic nationalism or racism, but a retreat inward, where they considered how they might be implicated in pasts that were dark and often hard to think through and articulate.<sup>445</sup> Many of my respondents were attempting to maintain their

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<sup>444</sup> During an interview I conducted, Land and Sea Country co-ordinator, Les Kosez, stated that a good indication that the Bundian Way was well supported is ‘through the different rhetoric spouted by different politicians. Andrew Constance (state minister for transport and infrastructure) is always saying he is all for it. Peter Scullin (representative for Eden-Monaro 2013-16) loves it. Mike Kelly (representative for Eden-Monaro, 2016) wants to run it as one of his platform promises’. Les Kosez also stated that ‘there is a shift toward being more receptive to what the Bundian Way is as a representation of Aboriginal culture. Through the interest and engagement and feedback from the different cultural tours that we have done, there seems to be a good reception to our vision of what we want to do and a ravenous appetite for taking part in it’. Les Kosez, interview with the Jodie Stewart, January 7, 2016, transcript AEM5. For further examples of political support see Denise Dion, ‘Kelly Commits to the Bundian Way’, *Eden Magnet*, June 20, 2016, <http://www.merimbulanewsweekly.com.au/story/3976766/kelly-commits-to-bundian-way/> and Jodie Stewart, ‘State Committed to Bundian Way says Andrew Constance following claims of funding Crisis’, *Eden Magnet*, March 9, 2018, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/5275051/state-committed-to-bundian-way-says-andrew-constance-following-claims-of-funding-crisis/>

<sup>445</sup> See for example Celeste Liddle ‘“I’m Not a “Proud Australian ”’, @IndigenousX, N.D, <http://indigenoux.com.au/im-not-a-proud-australian/#.WIa9mlN96Uk> and ‘Why I don’t Support Changing the date of “Amnesia Day”’ Eureka Street.com.au 27/1, January 22, 2017, <https://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=50528#.WIa831N96Um> and Luke Pearson, ‘Can Australia Handle the Idea that it wasn’t always the good guy’, @IndigenousX, N.D, <http://indigenoux.com.au/can->

racialised identities as ‘good white’ people but they were also attempting to form new settler identities that incorporated Indigenous sovereignties rooted in a deep Aboriginal past.

Returning to Jan Alexander’s notion of loss; Alexander writes in her blog that she could no longer live in a country that would not acknowledge the injustice and illegality of its foundational history. She writes that when she left Australia for Ireland in 1979 she experienced ‘a sense of relief’ and writes that she feels she ‘can breathe’ in Ireland.<sup>446</sup>

Alexander’s melancholic attempt to re-imagine Aboriginal people back into the landscapes of her childhood is an expression of loss that many settler peoples share because it speaks to the pain of erasure and the shame of settler complicity.<sup>447</sup> For settler people loss is a felt response to the understanding that they lack an authentic form of belonging and a sense of identity that might anchor them in place. Emotions like guilt, shame, anxiety and sadness manifested for my respondents when thinking through the complexities of the Aboriginal and settler past. Loss was intimately connected to their sense of identity as settler subjects who feel deeply about Aboriginal pasts.

For BJ Cruse, how the settler and Aboriginal histories of the Bundian Way are communicated to settler people is an important consideration. In an interview with me he stated, ‘we want to

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[australia-handle-the-idea-that-it-wasnt-always-the-good-guy/#.WibCHIN96Uk](#) and Nakkiah Lui, ‘Fighting the Myth’, *Saturday Paper*, January 28, 2017,

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2017/01/28/fighting-the-myth/14855220004157>

<sup>446</sup> Jan Alexander, ‘About’, *A Grey Area*, WordPress blog, <https://agreyarea.org/about/> (Accessed 10 Nov. 2015).

<sup>447</sup> Chris Healy writes about the paradox of Aboriginality where Indigenous people are imagined as absent in the face of a continued presence. He states that ‘settler Australians have, since the beginning, too often thought of indigenous people, and hence Aboriginality, as either absent or present -imagining that they were once in a place but now gone, belonging somewhere else or out of place, because they are out of time, finished and done for’. See Chris Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008), 10.



tell the true history, we want to tell it in a way so people become more sensitive. But we don't want to tell it in a way that they increase their racist attitudes because people get offended when you tell them what their ancestors did'.<sup>448</sup> BJ Cruse here reminds us of the sensitivities he needs to negotiate; settler and Aboriginal history is emotional, it elicits a felt response, and these responses matter.

Telling honest, emotional histories is a way of foregrounding qualities of generosity, ingenuity and strength and to reposition Aboriginal people as contributors. As BJ Cruse stated, 'in today's system, society sees Aboriginal people as detrimental and taking away. And that is how they treat us. If Aboriginal people are allowed to make greater contributions, allow our contributions to be seen by others and allow our contributions to be felt by others, then they will treat us as contributors'.<sup>449</sup> BJ Cruse, as well as many other Aboriginal Elders and activists working on the project, want to tell more honest histories, histories that address and try to counter some of the dominant stereotypes that have had damaging impacts on Aboriginal people and communities. One of these pervasive stereotypes is expressed in the language of loss that Aboriginal people are in deficit or 'have lost their way'.

Speaking at the 2016 *Recognise* meeting held at the Bega civic centre, BJ Cruse suggested that it is one thing to ask people to recognise Aboriginal people, it is another to get them to care.<sup>450</sup> A local school teacher I interviewed also spoke about the need for non-Indigenous people to care. She said:

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<sup>448</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, September 22, 2015, transcript AE3.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid.

<sup>450</sup> BJ Cruse, field work notes, July 21, 2016.

We white Australians are really steeped in racism. We are good people, we mean well and we don't want to be racists but we have grown up here in this environment and we've all got it to some degree. My sense is that we view the Bundian Way project as a great project—a positive project that will help the Aboriginal community build their sense of identity and pride. But we haven't really grasped what this means for us personally, the significance this has for white Australians. Our contact with Indigenous Australians can break down our racism, can start to unravel the effects of generations of colonisation, can help us face up to our history as perpetrators to genocide, can reteach us a way of being with ourselves and being in the environment that our society and our history have taught us to forget. I think this project will be further reaching and more deeply personal to all of us than we as the white community are currently able to be aware of.<sup>451</sup>

This teacher relayed feelings of hopefulness but also an acute understanding of the challenges that settlers face when adopting the subject position of the 'good white person'. To her the Bundian Way project holds immense possibilities that could enable settler people to 'face up to our history'. The project could, in her estimation, offer her, as part of the dominant group, opportunities to form new, more productive relations with people and the environment. This would also mean acknowledging that the 'good white person' inhabits a social and cultural environment that teaches us to forget and reinforces racist thoughts and behaviours, even as we actively attempt to reconstitute ourselves as anti-racists. Forging new relations means that we cannot easily forget the relational structures that order and regulate our contemporary lives as 'good white people'. In Lisa Slater's terms, we should stay with the trouble and engage with anxiety.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 9, 2015, transcript NAP11.

<sup>452</sup> Lisa Slater, 'Questioning Care', *The Pedagogies of Cultural Studies*, in Andrew Hickey ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 127.

The emotions expressed by my non-Aboriginal respondents were emotions of care and concern. But as some of my respondents intimated, sometimes these emotions can be debilitating. Lisa Slater has argued that settlers' emotional engagement with indigeneity – the anxiety, shame, and grief—can be a form of fleeing.<sup>453</sup> When we feel bad we often don't want to stay in that emotion because it's too much trouble, it hurts too much, so we flee in order to occupy more positive and familiar emotional spaces. Slater is here concerned that too often care becomes self-interest.<sup>454</sup> Sara Ahmed has similarly written about settler feelings, examining how 'feeling bad' can act to bring the nation into existence as a 'felt community'.<sup>455</sup> Ahmed examined the emotion of shame and argued that 'feeling bad' can make the nation feel better about itself as 'the very claim to feel bad also involves a self-perception of "being good"'.<sup>456</sup> Many of my respondents indicated their desire to be 'good white people', which often included 'feeling bad', but they were also trying to understand how to relate to an Indigenous world that they knew themselves to be disconnected from. Many expressed a form of frustration and even anger with their social and cultural inheritance as settler people; an inheritance that they perceived had excluded them from different ways of knowing and being in the world. Yet the Bundian Way project has also enabled them to feel hopeful and to embrace new possibilities that might enable Aboriginal people and settler people to forge more productive relations.

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<sup>453</sup> Slater, 'Questioning Care', 122.

<sup>454</sup> Slater, 'Questioning Care', 122.

<sup>455</sup> Ahmed, 'The Politics of Bad Feeling', 72.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

What does it mean to ‘feel bad’ about the settler Aboriginal past whilst simultaneously feeling hopeful about future possibilities? Is this just another form of ‘fleeing’<sup>457</sup> as Lisa Slater puts it? Slater suggests that the good white settler should question herself and not flee from the trouble. She proposes that settler people stay in the trouble.<sup>458</sup> To stay in the trouble would require us to not just think *about* care, but to think *with* care.<sup>459</sup> This type of care requires taking a deep interest in another’s world because to care is to relate, and we need to be able to relate differently, and be able to relate to one another.<sup>460</sup>

The Bundian Way project is helping to facilitate important and timely conversations about the history of Aboriginal and settler relations on the far south coast of New South Wales, a part of the nation state that has experienced a long and protracted history of settler colonisation. Many non-Indigenous, settler people who have engaged with the project experience difficulties grappling with pasts that they perceive as painful. Some are taking the extra step of choosing to ‘stay in the trouble’ or perhaps for a time ‘stay lost’. It may be too soon to know what the impact of this practice might be, but for now the past and the present have come together to enable non-Aboriginal people to formulate more productive futures in a place they call home with the Indigenous people whose home they acknowledge it is and always will be.

In the next chapter I address the notion of ‘shared history’ as it was communicated to me by Aboriginal Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project. I ask what it means to

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<sup>457</sup> Slater, ‘Questioning Care’, 122.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid., 126.

‘share’ history and pasts but also reflect on Indigenous practices and philosophies of sharing that have become an intrinsic part of Indigenous and settler relations on the far south coast of NSW. Shared usage of the Bundian Way by Indigenous and settler peoples makes up part of the history of the pathway that is being communicated through the project. Yet, a history of ‘sharing’ that is often initiated by Indigenous people and not reciprocated by settler Australians is a fundamental part of the history of the project itself, with Indigenous people sharing culture, history, stories and built infrastructure. Indigenous cultures of sharing stand in stark relief to the ‘white possessive logic’ of settler colonisation which continually reinscribes a taken-for-granted ownership of place, to draw on Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s formulation. I explore how cultures of sharing have played out within the project and consider what a ‘shared history’ approach means to the broader project of decolonisation on the far south coast.

## Chapter 7: 'Sharing' the Bundian Way

I would like to start with two separate but interconnected stories. In an interview in 2015, Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) Chairperson BJ Cruse shared this story with me:

There is two caves near Green Cape where Aboriginal people were rounded up and blown up in; and me nan, on my mother's side told me when they massacred Aboriginal people they burnt them on the log dumps, they set the logs on fire, the log stacks at the saw mills, they put them on top of them and burnt them; they would burn hot fires for a long period of time so it burnt all the bones. That happened in our boundary.<sup>461</sup>

BJ Cruse shared this unvarnished retelling of settler atrocities to make it clear that massacres occurred right here in our local area. These were not stories about other places. With Indigenous oral histories informing a broader national narrative around frontier violence, the prevalence of massacres perpetrated by early settlers is beginning to be better understood.<sup>462</sup> These stories, like this one shared by BJ Cruse, are told by many Indigenous people who have not only carried these stories with them but also the trauma the original violent act generated, through time and space and across many generations. These stories are also told by settler descendants but as BJ Cruse suggests, 'there is a difference in the stories; it depends who's telling them'.<sup>463</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, September 22, 2015, transcript AE3.

<sup>462</sup> Public interest in research undertaken by the University of Newcastle, Centre for the History of Violence and lead by historian of Aboriginal history Lyndall Ryan, is an example of the growing acknowledgment of frontier violence and Indigenous massacre. The research also includes a publicly accessible interactive massacre map of colonial frontier massacres. See, 'Mapping massacres of Australia's colonial frontier map', *Newsroom*, University of Newcastle Australia, <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/newsroom/featured-news/mapping-the-massacres-of-australias-colonial-frontier> (accessed on 5 September 2017).

<sup>463</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

My second story is this: In November 2015, pastor and Elder Ossie Cruse, BJ's father, told me a story about Aboriginal generosity in the face of opposition from some Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. He said:

In 1988 the federal government made a lot of money available to Aboriginal people because it was the Bicentenary and the federation of Australia. Some Aboriginal people said, 'no that's blood money...we won't take money from the government'. I said, 'give me some blood money', and I put in a submission for \$460,000 to beautify Lake Curalo.<sup>464</sup>

Ossie Cruse experienced significant barriers to achieving his goal of beautifying Eden's Curalo Lake which he said included having to pay \$10,000 of the grant money to the local council for an environmental impact study. But he was not perturbed. Ossie Cruse's determination to 'add value to the community' led him to the Brown family, a local Eden family. His idea was to provide the seed funding to help build a football ground in memory of a non-Indigenous man, the prominent Eden businessman, George Brown. As he states, 'I went and saw the Brown family and said "can we Kooris build this football ground?"'.<sup>465</sup> Consequently, on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of European colonisation, an Aboriginal community on the far south coast provided seed money for a football ground to be built in the township of Eden, to honour a non-Indigenous man. This gesture was performed in the spirit of generosity and with the intent to build a stronger community that was conceived as Indigenous and non-Indigenous. As Ossie Cruse suggested, 'the things we do for the town...I've always saw that you add value, you add value to the community, not that you are

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<sup>464</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 6, 2015, transcript AE2.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid.

going to get the results of that value, but it is still value for the community. It makes the community prosperous'.<sup>466</sup>

Ossie and BJ Cruse's careful history-work underscores the complexities of (re)conciliation in settler colonial Australia but more specifically how to tell histories of cross-cultural relations that will help to foster more productive relations in the present. At first glance their narratives may appear not to be connected but brought together they tell an intertwined story that speaks to the centrality of reconciliation and conflict in the broader narrative of settler and colonial relations. To explain the development of the Bundian Way project, Ossie Cruse started with two stories one of them was the story of the George Brown Memorial Oval. He wanted to communicate the continued material and financial contributions that the Indigenous community in Eden have made to the local area. The Bundian Way project is a continuation of the history of Indigenous sharing and generosity on the far south coast. In telling a story of Indigenous massacre, BJ Cruse was careful to point out the consequences of more honest histories of Aboriginal and settler Australia, 'you have to be careful because people get offended when you tell them what their ancestors done'.<sup>467</sup> Moreover, the entangled practices of reconciliation and conflict underpin the ongoing and often fraught process of sharing Aboriginal and settler histories. In telling stories of massacres and of Indigenous contributions, these men foreground the problematics of history-making in settler colonial Australia.

History-making and the telling of Indigenous stories on the Bundian Way is a complex process that my Indigenous informants tell me, requires careful diplomacy on their part.

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.



Moreover, this process of history-making is unfolding within the milieu of enduring settler colonisation that continues to reinstate and legitimise settler claims to land and resources. Aboriginal Elders and activists who I interviewed for this thesis indicated that they wished to tell histories of cross-cultural relations that include Indigenous acts of sharing but also foreground the fact and ongoing existence of Indigenous sovereignty. Aboriginal and settler people co-exist within Indigenous sovereignty even though the ‘white possessive logic’ of colonisation reinforces a taken-for-granted settler ownership of land.<sup>468</sup> Through the project, Indigenous people are creating opportunities to ‘share’ stories, knowledge and histories with the wider community in ways that might generate new understandings about shared pasts, and possible reconciled futures. Indigenous people are bringing to the fore past and contemporary Indigenous cultures of sharing but also helping to generate more productive conversations about contemporary Aboriginal culture and the complexities of Aboriginal sovereignty in settler colonial Australia.

This chapter looks at the complexities and challenges of Indigenous history-making on the far south coast as it emerged throughout this research project. It explores Indigenous conceptions of ‘sharing’ and ‘shared history’ as they were communicated to me by Aboriginal Elders and activists working on and advocating for the Bundian Way project. As a ‘shared history’ initiative, Aboriginal Elders and activists are telling histories that highlight the shared usage of the pathway by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the early years of settlement but, even more importantly, they are emphasising past and contemporary cultural practices of sharing, where Indigenous people shared, and continue to share, the pathway with settler

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<sup>468</sup> See Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

peoples. For non-Aboriginal people, the notion of ‘shared history’ is often understood within the context of wider reconciliation narratives that attempt to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together around the notion of national unity and a shared humanity.<sup>469</sup> Within this ‘shared history’ paradigm, however, Elders and activists have had to carefully define their concept of ‘sharing’, a concept that does not exactly correspond to non-Aboriginal understandings. They are intent on communicating histories that underscore Indigenous and settler relations without conflating Indigenous and non-Indigenous experiences of colonisation or erasing Indigenous cultural difference, a difference that is embedded in enduring Indigenous sovereignty.

This chapter will draw on the words of Elders and activists grappling with the complexities and challenges of history-making in settler colonial Australia, which for them, includes navigating non-Indigenous notions of sharing while attempting to reaffirm and reinscribe Indigenous sovereignty. It will also incorporate the words of some of my non-Indigenous respondents who spoke of some of the challenges they had faced when confronted with Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way. As argued in Chapter 6, my non-Indigenous respondents were grappling with some of the implications of more honest histories being told through the project. They were coming to terms with emotions like shame and guilt, but also complex feelings of loss, to think through often fraught and painful pasts. They were also struggling with how to be ‘good white people’ and allies to Indigenous people in the face of bigger nation-wide issues which include the acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty in the face of ongoing racism and settler colonisation. For Elders and activists on the far south coast the process of producing more honest histories often includes having to mitigate the

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<sup>469</sup> For a discussion on dominant reconciliation narratives and themes see Damien Short, ‘Reconciliation and the Problem of Internal Colonisation’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 26, no.3 (2005): 267-282.

confluence of settler emotions that manifest when sharing their histories with settler peoples. Non-Indigenous people are important to the project's success, both as consumers, consultants and collaborators. But they can also present a challenge when Indigenous people are faced with having to manage their anxieties and discomfort. There is also the fear that non-Indigenous people may withdraw their support at any time. When telling more honest histories, Indigenous people must carefully navigate both racists and 'good white people' at the same time.

For Indigenous people, history-making is a risky enterprise. For example, what happens when telling more honest histories means that non-Indigenous people increase their 'racist attitudes', to borrow BJ Cruse's term. What are the costs to Indigenous people of historical truth-telling? This chapter explores how Indigenous Elders and activists who are engaged with the project are attempting to navigate the risks of history-making on the far south coast. This is a process of 'truth-telling' that is unfolding within the context of ongoing settler colonisation and the denial of Indigenous sovereign rights but also by the attempts of well-intentioned non-Indigenous people to reconcile the nation's 'shared' past with the vision of a better more unified future.

### **7.1 Telling Indigenous Stories on the Far South Coast**

Several viewing platforms placed along the Bundian Way Story Trail face south overlooking Twofold Bay. From these platforms, as you cast your gaze across the bay and you can see many of the places that form part of Eden's Aboriginal and settler history. Boydtown the 'town' built by Scottish Entrepreneur Benjamin Boyd in the nineteenth century, the majestic Balawan (Mount Imlay) and Bilgalera (Fisheries Beach) can all be seen from these platforms. Two of these platforms, 'Budginbro Lookout' and 'Brierly Lookout', are named after Indigenous man Budginbro and British marine artist Oswald Brierly.

Along the Bundian Way ‘Story Trail’ were the platforms now stand the views are impressive. On a clear blue-sky day, the water is a translucent turquoise, the beach sand is golden, and the rocks reveal a kaleidoscope of colour.<sup>470</sup> To complete the idyllic scene, on the day of the UOW Cultural tour on October 2015, dolphins cut the surface of the water. Pulling close to pathway’s edge, a non-Indigenous tour attendee raised one hand and covered her left eye to block out a large industrial crane that hugged the edge of the sea and beachscape in front of her. ‘Wouldn’t it be great if that wasn’t there’, she said.<sup>471</sup> As our Indigenous guide talked about Indigenous whaling practices and the Indigenous whalers who played a vital role in the nascent European industry that Brierly was sent to preside over, the dolphins continued to dance. ‘We organised this just for you’, the tour guide joked as he swung an arm over the scene to further draw our attention toward the parading dolphins.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>470</sup> Note: the Budginbro and Brierly Lookouts were completed after research for this thesis was conducted. During the 2015 cultural tour, tour guides stopped at these sites where the platforms now stand to tell Indigenous and non-Indigenous stories about Twofold bay.

<sup>471</sup> Jodie Stewart, Bundian Way Cultural Tour, Field Work Notes, October 1, 2015.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 6.3: View from 'Brierly Lookout', Bundian Way 'Story Trail'.*

Brierly spent seven years in Twofold Bay and surrounds where he made detailed sketches and wrote about his experiences in his journal.<sup>473</sup> He wrote extensively on a journey he made from Twofold Bay in Eden to the high country with Benjamin Boyd and an Aboriginal man named Budginbro between December 1842 and January 1843. The party travelled along parts of the Bundian Way guided by Budginbro who would have had an intimate knowledge of the pathway. The story of Budginbro and Brierly is embedded within the collective memory of many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people on the far south coast as well as evidenced in the non-human landscape. The story featured prominently in the early stages of the project with reproductions of Brierley's sketches exhibited in local galleries and now hung permanently at the Keeping Place, Jigamy Farm.

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<sup>473</sup> For example see Oswald Brierly, *notes on Twofold bay and the Wanderer*, 1843-1845 and *Journal at Maneroo*, Dec. 1842- Jan. 1843, <https://archival.sl.nsw.gov.au/Details/archive/110318855>

Brierley and other early Europeans, like George Augustus Robinson, documented their sometimes-intimate encounters with Aboriginal people.<sup>474</sup> These journals have been revisited by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal historians, some looking carefully into the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the early years of settlement. Drawing on Brierley's journals, non-Indigenous historian Mark McKenna wrote about Brierley's relationships with Aboriginal people in Twofold Bay in his 2002 publication *Looking for Blackfella's Point* paying attention to the intimacies of black and white relations on the early frontiers of settlement. McKenna argued that Brierley was writing at a time when traditional society had experienced extreme dislocation but also when the experience of contact was still novel enough to carry a sense of discovery and curiosity.<sup>475</sup>

The story of Budginbro and his journey with Brierly and Boyd is told on cultural tours and in other public forums by project spokespeople like Les Kosez and also by non-Aboriginal people like John Blay. Through physical infrastructure and through Indigenous people sharing their stories of cross-cultural relationships, the story of Budginbro and Brierly is being reimagined as one of Indigenous generosity and ingenuity. The stories highlight a sovereign people and their culture of sharing that facilitated the development of past and contemporary cross-cultural relationships.

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<sup>474</sup> See Ian Clarke, *Journals of George Augustus, Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate: Volume 4, 1 January 1844- 24 October 1845* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

<sup>475</sup> Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas Point: An Aboriginal History of Place* (University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 126.



*Figure 6. 4: View from 'Budginbro Lookout', Bundian Way 'Story Trail'.*

The two viewing platforms provide a physical space to expound upon the relationship between Brierly and Budginbro. Guided tours tell the story in the place where their relationship was formed but that place also suggests the role other Aboriginal people played as intermediaries and guides in the early years of settlement. Through the Bundian Way project Indigenous people once more are guiding non-Indigenous people along their pathways and sharing their knowledge and stories with them. On that resplendent blue-sky day in October, Indigenous guides shared the story of Budginbro and Brierly with their non-Indigenous guests. For me, and likely other non-Indigenous people in attendance that day, it was not hard to feel imbued with a sense of hope and to feel a strong connection across time and space to this story of kindness and shared humanity. Yet there are parts of the broader story of Indigenous and settler relations that for some settler peoples up-ends this hopeful feeling. These are pasts that are often covered-over which continue to resurface. That non-Indigenous tour attendee who endeavoured to take in a precolonial view of the bay, eventually tired and dropped her hand, the industrial crane re-emerged.

Through the project, Aboriginal Elders and activists tell stories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and highlight the impacts of British invasion which include the effects of settler invasion on Indigenous lands and the ensuing and often violent battles over resources. Reminders of the violence and ongoing injuries of settler colonisation are in the landscape. They are apparent to many Indigenous people but too few non-Indigenous people, who have to work harder to see and acknowledge the physical evidence of colonisation. But increasingly the impacts of settler invasion are featured in the stories that are being told about these places by Indigenous people. In explaining the work involved in regenerating native yams, for example, Aileen Blackburn often drew attention to the early incursion of settler livestock that led to the reduction and near eradication of this vital food source.<sup>476</sup> On the cultural tour, Indigenous tour guides spoke to attendees about growing-up in settler colonial Australia. One tour guide spoke about family members who remain reticent to speak and share language due to remembered settler acts of silencing and attempted cultural erasure.<sup>477</sup> Indigenous people remember and see a history of their dispossession, they also see non-Indigenous people profiting from this dispossession and the resultant degradation of their lands. While settler livestock trampled native yams, nearly erasing them from the landscape, pastoralist and graziers grew wealthy from the same livestock which grew fat off fertile Indigenous lands. There is significant risk to Indigenous people when they share their stories with non-Indigenous people. As the tour guide pointed out, this risk includes the suppression of language and culture

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<sup>476</sup> See Chapter 6.

<sup>477</sup> Jodie Stewart, Bundian Way Cultural Tour, field work notes, October 1, 2015.



The sharing of stories is a key part of a thematic framework designed to help visitors to the Bundian Way interpret the Aboriginal and settler past.<sup>478</sup> The first theme ‘Sharing Our Stories’, implies cross-cultural encounter and stories of friendship but it also simultaneously calls to mind why that sharing is so urgent—that is, the long history of mutual misunderstanding and conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The two other proposed themes, ‘Nourishing Terrain’ and ‘Walking our Way’ draw on stories of Indigenous connection to country and life-affirming cultural practices that also include connections, exchanges and interactions between Indigenous groups. The story of Budginbro and Brierly is part of the ‘Sharing our Story’ theme that is designed to counter the dominant stories of hostile encounters between Aboriginal people and settlers, although those are also included.

Both conflict and cross-cultural friendship are woven into the fabric of the Aboriginal and settler past on the Bundian Way. When I asked Elder Ossie Cruse to tell me how the Bundian Way project came about he told me two stories. The first is Captain Cook’s incursion onto Gadigal lands in 1770 and that was closely followed by the story of the George Brown Memorial Oval. According to western chronologies a large expanse of time separates these two narratives and a temporal and numerical incongruity is created when these histories are placed side-by-side. In telling the story of the Bundian Way project as a story of Indigenous generosity, Ossie Cruse brings these two narratives together – they become two strands plaited together in the same weave. Yet, for some non-Indigenous people these narratives,

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<sup>478</sup> GML Heritage, ‘The Bundian Way: Interpretative Strategy, Draft Report: Report prepared for Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council’, April 2015, 31. The Interpretative strategy was composed by GML Heritage in consultation with the Eden LALC in April 2015.

which emphasise Indigenous generosity and cultures of sharing, punctuate the evenly woven fabric of the nation's dominant narrative.

Ossie Cruse's diplomacy is underpinned by his evangelical Christian beliefs and a life spent negotiating with the non-Indigenous community to help foster more productive Aboriginal and settler relations.<sup>479</sup> His efforts to share the 'blood money' offered by the federal government in 1988 with the wider community was an attempt to build communities—both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—and to strengthen wider community relations. The money that helped to build this sports field, was a significant gift made by the Indigenous community. As Ossie Cruse reminded me many times over the course of my research, his people's world view is based on cultures of generosity that include values, practices and behaviours that continued after the onset of European colonisation and remain in the present day. These values, practices and behaviours benefited settlers and early Europeans even though these invaders often did not reciprocate. Djiringanj man Warren Foster who was part of the 2010-11 survey team reminded me of this when he stated that 'after all that they have done, we still manage to give and forgive'.<sup>480</sup>

These men's stories highlight the complexities and the often-fraught nature of cross-cultural relations in contemporary settler colonial Australia. The willingness of past and contemporary Aboriginal people to share their resources, their stories and their knowledge was and is undertaken in the face of settler practices (and current government policies) that seek to erase them. Paradoxically settler practices of erasure often embed dominant

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<sup>479</sup> Ossie Cruse's years of negotiation and diplomacy were documented in a 2017 episode of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's documentary series, *Australian Story*. See, 'The Peacemaker', *Australian Story*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/austory/the-peacemaker/8663226>

<sup>480</sup> Warren Foster, interview with Jodie Stewart, January 6, 2016, transcript AA3.

understandings about Aboriginal people and culture, which (as I argued in Chapter 3), positions Indigenous people as the antithesis of generous and often informs how the Aboriginal and settler past on the far south coast is understood.

One of my non-Aboriginal participants, an Eden resident, informed me that at a community meeting in Eden some of the attendees had not simply forgotten, but actively refuted the fact that Aboriginal people had provided the seed funding for the George Brown Memorial Oval. For them it was inconceivable that the Aboriginal community could act with benevolence and good will.<sup>481</sup> They were confirming the dominant narrative, that Indigenous people are not contributors or nation-builders. They are seen as ‘detrimental or taking away’, to use BJ Cruse’s words.<sup>482</sup> In Eden, the Indigenous story of the George Brown Memorial Oval punctuates the tightly woven fabric of dominant settler history. Moreover, these rupturings of dominant history affects settler people in particular ways. For some of the attendees at the community meeting, this story of Indigenous generosity produced feelings of incredulity, and a refutation of Indigenous contributions to the community. This disbelief, or determined holding-on to a shared sensibility, greatly impacts the Indigenous community.

Indigenous Elders and activists working on the project are acutely aware of the power of settler emotions to bring harm, but their continued work on the project is testimony to their belief in its productive potential. One of the Aboriginal artists working on the project suggested that the Bundian Way might generate greater empathy among non-Aboriginal people. He said:

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<sup>481</sup> South Coast History Day Attendee (2), interview with Jodie Stewart, April 6, 2017, transcript NAP21.

<sup>482</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

The more people, I believe, that learn about our culture and our lifestyle and what we've lost from the past, they can sort of get more of an understanding of what we have been through... We've got to teach people what our lifestyle was, of what we used to have and the more people that can understand that and understand why we are so troubled these days, then they might start helping 'em a little bit more.<sup>483</sup>

For this young Aboriginal man, connecting with non-Aboriginal people to generate greater awareness and perhaps, care and concern, is an 'important issue'.<sup>484</sup> Land and Sea Country Co-ordinator for the Eden LALC, Les Kosez, articulated a similar vision for the Bundian Way project:

We are quick to grasp onto the iconic history of the battling farmer and battling hardships of the environment, we love that, but ... we don't even recognise any hardships of the battling, struggling Aboriginal people that were battling and struggling against a complete change in their life. There was all this influence brought in that they weren't equipped to deal with: the alcohol, fences even. We want to really display and communicate that there is a negative aspect to the shared history, but we want to acknowledge it, understand it and use it as a means of moving forward, not a means of something to dwell on.<sup>485</sup>

Like the young Aboriginal artist quoted above, Les Kosez suggested that a better understanding of our region's 'shared history' might enable better cross-cultural relations. Moreover, he suggested that communicating the 'negative aspects of our shared history' might engender a better understanding of contemporary Aboriginal people and the impacts of settler colonisation. This approach might move the conversation away from the 'battling

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<sup>483</sup> Aboriginal artist, interview with Jodie Stewart, July 22, 2015, transcript AA1.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

<sup>485</sup> Les Kosez, interview with Jodie Stewart, January 7, 2016, transcript AEM5.

(white) farmer' toward a more nuanced understanding of both Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal lives in settler colonial Australia. As the young Aboriginal artist said about the past and contemporary lives of Indigenous people, 'the more people that can understand that and understand why we are so troubled these days, then they might start helping 'em a little bit more'.<sup>486</sup>

Les Kosez foregrounded the careful work required of Indigenous people when sharing their stories about the Aboriginal and settler past. He acknowledged that negative pasts can become places, not of understanding and moving forward, but places to dwell. Within this polarising milieu, the telling of these histories can renew and heighten feelings of hostility held by some non-Indigenous people toward Indigenous people. As BJ Cruse suggested regarding non-Indigenous responses to local massacre stories told by Aboriginal people, 'we don't want to tell it in a way that people increase their racist attitudes'.<sup>487</sup> These men are fully aware of the potential consequences for the project in communicating the 'negative aspects' of the settler and Aboriginal past, particularly those pasts that connect contemporary non-Indigenous people to acts of settler violence. Active opposition and offence-taking by some non-Indigenous people to Indigenous history-making, brings a real danger of an increase in racism and racist practices. For Indigenous people who wish to share their stories about the Aboriginal and settler past, the stakes are high.

Sharing histories in the context of protracted settler colonisation is a complex issue. One of my non-Indigenous respondents, a local high school teacher, explained that the only

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<sup>486</sup> Aboriginal artist, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>487</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

Indigenous student artwork to be torn off the walls of the school was ‘a painting about Reconciliation’.<sup>488</sup> The teacher proposed a likely reason for this vandalism: ‘maybe because it was low-down on the wall and easy to get to’.<sup>489</sup> Even with this possible explanation, it is hard to bypass the symbolism of this act as representative of the precarious nature of Aboriginal and settler relations in the age of Reconciliation: a contested but also low-down, priority. This same school teacher and one of his colleagues indicated that relationships within the school and the wider community could be strengthened by Aboriginal people sharing their knowledge and stories. At the same time, they recognised the problematics of this sharing. The teacher who spoke about the vandalised painting said:

talking about it [the Bundian Way] with other people is going to make more awareness and that is important...I think they [non-Aboriginal students] were a bit dubious at first...I don’t think they know about it. I think it was sort of like a secret.<sup>490</sup>

His colleague indicated his frustration when some information that he sought from Indigenous people within the community was not forthcoming:

It’s that walking on glass syndrome. It means that the available knowledge, the knowledge that we can know is not getting out as quickly as it should. And people like me cannot use it to generate interest. A couple of times I asked a question and the door quickly shut in my face. Look I’ve got to be honest with you; that caused a bit of frustration.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> Non-Indigenous/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 4, 2015, transcript NAP10.

<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid.

<sup>491</sup> Non -Indigenous /local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 3, 2015, transcript NAP7.

As I observed in Chapter 6, a keen desire to know more about the Bundian Way was an integral part of how the project was understood by some of my non-Indigenous respondents. These local school teachers also indicated to me that they wanted to know more but that desire entangled them in the fraught politics and emotions of knowledge exchange in settler colonial Australia. The assumption that much Indigenous knowledge on the far south coast was a ‘secret’ and could not be shared with the non-Indigenous community informed how these local teachers interacted and engaged with the Bundian Way project and Indigenous people more broadly. For these local teachers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships were fragile and those who wished to do the ‘right’ thing, what Lisa Slater might call, ‘good white people’ were left ‘walking on glass’.<sup>492</sup> This ‘walking-on-glass syndrome’ is predicated on the presumed simmering hostility of Indigenous people who if provoked could sever all relations, or as the local teacher explained, quickly shut the door. Non-Indigenous people were ‘dubious’ about engaging in an already murky and shrouded past, when Indigenous people might suddenly respond in a hostile way. The glass veneer of a reconciled present and future could shatter at the feet of ‘good white people’ at any moment, or perhaps be ripped apart just like the vandalised Indigenous artwork.

## **7.2 Shared Places and Living in Indigenous Sovereignty**

For Indigenous Elders and activists, the Aboriginal and settler past is very present and is an important part of understanding Indigenous sovereignty in contemporary settler colonial Australia. In an interview with me, BJ Cruse explained how the Aboriginal and settler past remains co-present in the landscape:

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<sup>492</sup> Lisa Slater, *Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism: Australia, Race and Place* (New York, Routledge, 2018).

There was a river crossing up there near White Rock where there is stepping stones across this creek, that is a type of bridge across that river before non-Aboriginal people came here. And then later on right beside it there is a corduroy bridge which was an early form of a bridge-making where they lay logs across the river. And those sorts of bridges were made when the bullocking teams were around and that sort of transport and cargo shipment. And beside that there is more, at a later date, a bridge construction where they put piers and deck on above the water level<sup>493</sup>

He pointed out that, ‘on one hand it was a shared history’, as the landscape at White Rock demonstrates, but through the Bundian Way project he hopes ‘to remind people about those sorts of things but also... to let people know that we are the owners and custodians of our traditional Aboriginal sites’.<sup>494</sup> The path’s history of shared use does not erase its deep Indigenous past or the sovereignty of its Indigenous custodians.

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<sup>493</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid.





Figure 7.1: *A creek at Nungatta near Bombala that contains evidence of shared use between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.*

BJ Cruse's description of the shared usage of the pathway at White Rock is presented as a palimpsest, where an Indigenous presence remains in the landscape despite settler attempts to erase or remove it. A palimpsest is defined as 'a manuscript or piece of writing material on which later writing has been superimposed' with the altered document still bearing the traces

of its original form.<sup>495</sup> Places are also palimpsests. Post-colonial theorists Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffin and Helen Tiffins described the palimpsest in relation to place as ‘a kind of parchment on which successive generations have inscribed and reinscribed the process of history’.<sup>496</sup> An Indigenous bridge at White Rock endured into another in the era of bullock drays and wheeled transport, which in turn was superseded by a bridge suitable for motor transport. All these features remain to tell a multi-layered, polyphonic story of place.

BJ Cruse’s description of the landscape at White Rock exposes its intertwined and overlapping histories. The material traces of Indigenous history in that place, even when built over by settler technologies, remain. Moreover, BJ Cruse’s contrapuntal reading of the landscape highlights the fact that in his terms, Aboriginal people on the far south coast were not erased but are still ‘the same people’.<sup>497</sup> Material traces mark and make visible Indigenous histories but also for many Indigenous people they link them to a deep ancestral past.<sup>498</sup> Dominant settler histories have attempted to sever this link and by doing so deny Indigenous people’s connections to place. Just as the Bundian Way is still present in the landscape, Aboriginal people on the far south coast are also present and have not been written over by the palimpsest of settler colonialism. As BJ Cruse states, ‘they did not wipe us out

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<sup>495</sup> ‘Palimpsest’, *Oxford English Dictionary online*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/palimpsest>

<sup>496</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffins eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997), 392.

<sup>497</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>498</sup> Dennis Byrne argued that for Indigenous people on the far south coast material traces in the landscape act like ‘quasi land-deeds’ or ‘land titles’. They provide physical evidence of Indigenous sovereignty and a long enduring connection to place. See Dennis Byrne, ‘Difference’, in *The Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, eds. Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison, Angela Piccini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 290-291

and we started again... because a lot of non-Aboriginal people think that we are not Aboriginal people anymore, we lost our culture'.<sup>499</sup>

BJ Cruse also reminded me that the pathway facilitated different practices for settler and Aboriginal people. 'We was using the pathway to connect with ceremonies' he explained, 'and non-Aboriginal people were using it for trade and increasing their colonisation; connecting their holdings with the cities and townships'.<sup>500</sup> His perception that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal connections are different served to foreground contemporary practices of sharing that have come to define how Aboriginal Elders and activists working on the project understand 'shared history'. As BJ Cruse stated, 'today's shared history is mainly Aboriginal people sharing with government and sharing the pathway itself'.<sup>501</sup> While it is important to communicate how non-Aboriginal people used the pathway and the various ways that non-Aboriginal people are connected to it, BJ Cruse is committed to educating non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal history and culture in ways that (re)position contemporary Aboriginal people as custodians of their 'traditional Aboriginal sites'.<sup>502</sup> As BJ Cruse stated 'We want people to know that we are the owners and custodians of our traditional Aboriginal sites and we are saying we want to share that with the general public'.<sup>503</sup> To use the palimpsest metaphor once more, stories of shared usage and of land that was shared does not erase a deep and enduring Indigenous sovereignty.

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<sup>499</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid.

<sup>502</sup> Ibid.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

Within this paradigm of sharing, BJ Cruse foregrounded the problematic nature of ‘Native Title’. He acknowledged that settler colonial practices, especially those enshrined in federal and state legislation, have had an enduring impact on the survival of Indigenous culture. He stated, ‘native title... there is a few problems with it. One problem is that it states ‘Native Title owners’. In traditional culture we weren’t owners. The creator was an owner; we were custodians.’<sup>504</sup> The Bundian Way project seeks to share cultural knowledge, Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that can underscore different ways of relating to country, ways that do not, in BJ Cruse’s words, ‘put a Westminster type asset’ onto land. Elder Aileen Blackburn also suggested that different ways of relating to the land could facilitate different relationships between people and place outside of western legal and economic frameworks. She explained that after a white farmer asked her how to he might encourage his adult children to return to the family property she said, ‘take away the dollar signs and the ownership and that side of it and they’ll come’. <sup>505</sup>

Native title laws have worked to structure how Aboriginal culture and identity is defined and how contemporary Aboriginal culture is understood by the non-Indigenous community. The discourse that underpins broader community understanding of Native Title is informed by notions that the Aboriginal community on the far south coast have lost their culture. And as I argued in Chapter 5, the dominant understanding that Indigenous people have ‘lost their culture’ has produced feelings of loss among some of my non-Indigenous participants. It also embedded dominant understandings of Aboriginal identity, where Aboriginality was defined by the performance of traditional practices based on an uninterrupted connection to country.

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid.

<sup>505</sup> Aileen Blackburn, interview with Jodie Stewart, transcript AE1.

This was reflected in a response made by one of my participants who suggested that ‘culture was strong’ in Alice Springs because ‘land was still being sung’.<sup>506</sup>

Native title requires that Indigenous claimants prove a long and continued occupation and association with their ancestral lands, which as BJ Cruse explained, is problematic and delimiting.<sup>507</sup> He emphatically questioned settler law:

They made laws preventing you from practising culture, passing down law and knowledge and then say, “you prove how you do that?” They sold off land and put up fences and stopped us from visiting our sacred and special places and now they say “you prove who you are?”.<sup>508</sup>

In sharing the histories and stories of the Bundian Way with government and with the broader non-Aboriginal community, BJ Cruse hopes to communicate that Aboriginal people are still the ‘same people’, but also to move the conversation away from ideas of loss and cultural erasure as expressed by some non-Indigenous people. This discourse of loss is embedded in legal documents but also in the consciousness of some non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. It has impacted on how non-Indigenous people define and subsequently relate to Indigenous people, but also how Indigenous people define and relate to each other. As one of the Aboriginal artists employed to work on the project explained to me:

The kids now think that our culture is gone. It’s dead. It’s gone. And I try to teach ’em it’s not gone. It’s we still survive and survive easy. As long as you can make a fire and keep warm and get yourself a feed every day, then that’s your culture and that’s all you really need to know.<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Non-Indigenous/creative art student, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, transcript NAPFG1.

<sup>507</sup> See *Justice Brenna, Mabo and Others vs Queensland (no.2)* (1992) 175 CLR 1 F C 92/014: 42.

<sup>508</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>509</sup> Aboriginal Artist, interview with Jodie Stewart.

For this Indigenous artist, Indigenous cultural identity is not a contrived or imposed definition that supposes that ‘culture is gone’. It is the simple fact that Indigenous culture survives and can continue to do so.

BJ Cruse argued that the legal requirements of native title law do not allow for kinship relations which have endured in the face of settler colonisation. These kinship relations are expressed through practices of inclusion and acceptance that both BJ and Ossie Cruse argued have kept their community strong and resilient. As BJ Cruse stated, ‘we have always accepted people into our communities and made them part of our community and accepted them as our people’.<sup>510</sup> Ossie Cruse stated in an interview with ABC South East Radio that there are parts of culture that cannot be erased. The ABC reporter asked Ossie Cruse to comment on cultural loss within the community, asking him, ‘How much has been lost, is it still being lost or are you reversing it?’<sup>511</sup> Ossie Cruse’s response speaks to the problematics of defining Aboriginal culture and identity in contemporary settler colonial Australia. The suggestion of a reversal supposes that somehow the damage can be undone, that the fullness of Indigenous culture pulled apart by the injuries and violence of colonisation can be somehow stuck back together. Ossie Cruse addressed this idea: ‘I would not say reversing. We are building on what we have left’.<sup>512</sup> He also countered this assertion by acknowledging the strength and resilience of kinship and familial ties which he suggested ‘can be changed to some extent but that no one can erase’.<sup>513</sup> Some of my Indigenous respondents indicated how

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<sup>510</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>511</sup> Ossie Cruse, Interviewed by Bill Brown, ‘Bundian Way Preserves and Shares Aboriginal Culture’ *ABC South East New South Wales*, July 4, 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/06/02/4017106.htm>

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

they drew strength from their family in the face of sometimes insurmountable barriers. As one respondent put it ‘I am lucky because I have a family that is very strong in their identity and knowledge as well’.<sup>514</sup> For some Aboriginal people, the Bundian Way is about family and connectedness. Just like the pathway connected varied landscapes, it also connected people and forged enduring connections between them. Connections that Ossie Cruse declared ‘cannot be erased’.

This ‘shared history’ approach is also an attempt to counter the deleterious impacts on past and present Aboriginal people of western historicising. Land and Sea Country co-ordinator, Les Kosez argued that the Bundian Way project might enable Aboriginal Elders and activists to ‘describe our influence and our participation in the region’.<sup>515</sup> This has proven difficult with the imposition of European histories that have come to dominate contemporary understandings of place: ‘some histories have downplayed purposely or inadvertently misrepresented our traditional peoples’ place in country and in the landscape’, Les Kosez stated.<sup>516</sup> But as he further explained, the Bundian Way ‘is a physical manifestation of the cultural practices in traditional times’ and a tangible way of ensuring that ‘the next generation will have significant foundations to stand on or build off’.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Aboriginal Participant, interview with Jodie Stewart, February 8, 2016, Transcript, AA2.

<sup>515</sup> Les Kosez, Interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

<sup>517</sup> Les Kosez, interview with Jodie Stewart.

### 7.3 Sharing Spaces and Navigating Contemporary Indigenous Life Worlds

As I argued in Chapter 4, for some of the younger Aboriginal people working on the project, the concept of ‘shared history’ is complex and often tied to contemporary concerns. Young employees are utilising shared histories to (re) conceptualise their identity as Aboriginal people in contemporary settler colonial Australia but also to (re) negotiate contemporary Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. In places like Eden, where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people interact on a sometimes-daily basis, these negotiations can be fraught and painful, as the young male employees’ examples of everyday racism demonstrates.<sup>518</sup> Yet Aboriginal people often form intimate relations and share children and domestic lives with non-Aboriginal people. This intimacy reflects the complexity of cross-cultural relations in settler colonial Australia. One of the young women working on the AWAY project indicated this complexity but also the possibilities within this cross-cultural space, stating that her children share a non-Aboriginal father and ‘are exposed to both worlds... I think that is awesome’.<sup>519</sup>

These ‘shared histories’ are also reconceptualised as stories of ‘acceptance’, where Aboriginal people are accepted based on a shared humanity and not through the prism of race.<sup>520</sup> As one of the young AWAY workers indicated to me, ‘we are all equal. Everyone has got a heart just like everyone else’.<sup>521</sup> Aboriginal artist and Bundian Way tour guide Darren Mongta expressed a similar sentiment when he stated in an interview with ABC Radio

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<sup>518</sup> See Chapter 4.

<sup>519</sup> Aboriginal Employee (2), focus group interview with Jodie Stewart, transcript AEFG1.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.



National that cultural tour participants ‘might come away thinking; that koori bloke, he’s a good bloke, he’s alright!’<sup>522</sup> In that same interview Darren Mongta also suggested that the Bundian Way project might help to build better relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through the sharing of knowledge: ‘I am glad to be able to pass on whatever I can to my younger generation and to also the non-Indigenous to help break down a lot of tensions between our mob and non-Indigenous’.<sup>523</sup>

The tensions Darren Mongta talked about are often underpinned by the understanding among some non-Indigenous people that Aboriginal people are antagonistic toward them. The presumption that Indigenous people were hostile toward a non-Indigenous request for knowledge had created feelings of discomfort and unease expressed as a feeling of ‘walking on glass’ among some non-Indigenous people. These non-Indigenous people of good will indicated that Indigenous people were hostile to their requests, the antithesis of Darren Mongta’s ‘good bloke’ who is willing to share his knowledge and culture in the spirit of generosity. But what happens when Indigenous people choose not to share? Especially, when that sharing comes with the danger of the erasure or theft of culture? For Indigenous people, the decision to share or not to share often involves sorting through the implications and ascertaining what the response might be from both racist and non-racist white Australians, ‘good white people’. This requires a great deal of work from Indigenous people and involves having to navigate and manage settler emotions.

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<sup>522</sup> Darren Mongta, ‘Walk with the Ancients on the Bundian Way’, Interviewed by Patricia Karvelias, *The Drawing Room*, ABC Radio National, August 15, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/drawingroom/walking-with-the-ancients-along-the-bundian-way/6709540>

<sup>523</sup> Ibid.

#### 7.4 'Reconciling' Our 'Shared History': What Does Sharing Look Like?



Figure 7.2: An Indigenous artwork at Eden Marine High depicting reconciliation. November 4 2015.

BJ Cruse recognised the limits of reconciliation, which in recent years have also expanded to incorporate a movement to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the

constitution.<sup>524</sup> He suggested that state-sanctioned attempts to build a better, more reconciled nation are often thinly veiled attempts to further ostracise and erase Aboriginal people. Here he pointed to the ways in which the settler state has attempted to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together as part of a unified civic order. The 1967 referendum was part of this ongoing colonial project, he stated: ‘It wasn’t the government that all of a sudden started to feel sorry for Aboriginal people and stopped being racists... We are Australian citizens and that’s convenient for government too because they don’t have to pay us for our treaty’.<sup>525</sup> BJ Cruse was sceptical of attempts by the settler state to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together under the unifying banner of citizenship, arguing that this strategic move erodes the unique claims that Indigenous people have to their sovereign lands.

Some of my non-Aboriginal respondents, were looking for ways to better understand the notion of ‘shared history’ and how it fit within the broader narrative of Aboriginal and settler reconciliation. My non-Aboriginal survey participants often interpreted the notion of ‘shared history’ within the paradigm of ‘reconciliation’. They wrote about opportunities to ‘walk together’ and indicated that they ‘wanted to find a shared path’.<sup>526</sup> Some also expressed ‘eudaimonic emotions’ about their face-to-face interactions with Aboriginal people. As Penny Edmonds argued, performances of reconciliation are often marked by intense feelings,

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<sup>524</sup> Reconciliation Australia have now taken over work of the Recognise movement. The Recognise website is archived through the National Library of Australia, Trove at <https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20130425164034/http://www.recognise.org.au/>

<sup>525</sup> BJ Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>526</sup> Tour attendee, ‘UOW Bega, BW Cultural Tour excursion’, online survey, *Survey Monkey Inc.*, October 9, 2015

which signify something social, of what it is ‘to live well’.<sup>527</sup> One of my respondents, an interstate artist, articulated how she felt when listening to Indigenous stories told to her by Indigenous people: ‘Read our body language. It was transformative...and I am not trying to do a Disney brush here, there is no substitute for an authentic first-hand experience...that was an incredibly enriching experience.’<sup>528</sup>

Many of my non-Indigenous participants interpreted sharing as an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come together and occupy the same spaces. As one of my non-Indigenous participants, a local school teacher, suggested; ‘It will strengthen relations... through together-time between students and non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal grown-ups, and all of the above mixed together’.<sup>529</sup> Another respondent, a member of the advisory committee, said that, ‘I think it will definitely be a fantastic opportunity for different cultures to hopefully come together to explore issues together, instead of being us and them’.<sup>530</sup> One of the local teachers also drew attention to the potential of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people coming together, he said; ‘I think that anything that is shared, a shared experience, I think is a positive opportunity for growth’.<sup>531</sup> All of these respondents indicated a strong desire to engage with Aboriginal people. The notion of ‘shared history’ for them was about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people forming potentially more productive relations by

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<sup>527</sup> Penny Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and Reconciliation: Frontier Violence, Affective Performances, and Imaginative Refoundings* (Palgrave, 2016), 7.

<sup>528</sup> Non-Aboriginal/creative artist, focus group interview with Jodie Stewart.

<sup>529</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 4, 2015, transcript NAP10.

<sup>530</sup> Non-Aboriginal/Bundian Way Advisory Committee member, interview with Jodie Stewart, October 27, 2015, transcript NAP4.

<sup>531</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 13, 2015, transcript NAP12.

coming together and ‘sharing experiences’. ‘Shared history’ was about ‘together time’, as the local school teacher put it. The ‘shared history’ of the pathway was interpreted as an expectation of better cross-cultural relations through face-to-face interactions. In this context, ‘shared history’ was imagined by these ‘good white people’ as the hope for a better future where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can ‘walk together’.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants expressed desires to build better social relations and often contemplated what a more ‘reconciled’ future might look like. As one of my non-Aboriginal respondents suggested ‘I think a lot of times I feel guilt or that I shouldn’t do that or go there...but if they are going to open it up and do tours but make it a shared place it would make people feel welcome and united. Especially if the Aboriginal community invited that’.<sup>532</sup> This respondent indicated that by Indigenous and non-Indigenous coming together in a ‘shared place’ the guilt that he felt about dispossession could be assuaged. Being welcomed on to Indigenous lands by Indigenous people could make him feel like he belonged. Moreover, this welcome needed to include reassurances by Indigenous people that the land was shared: ‘open it up... but make it a shared place’. Being reconciled meant that Indigenous people shared the land with settler people. Settler emotions also play a part in this reconciled future, the local teacher felt guilt and the need to be welcomed, gesturing toward possible Indigenous hostility or of having the ‘door shut in your face’ as his colleague put it.<sup>533</sup> Indigenous people are also part of this process of reconciliation on the Bundian Way

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<sup>532</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, October 29, 2015, transcript NAP6.

<sup>533</sup> Non-Aboriginal/Bundian Way Advisory Committee member, interview with Jodie Stewart, October 27, 2015, transcript NAP4.

and are required to manage and ameliorate settler feelings because if they ‘open it up’ as a ‘shared space’ people would feel ‘welcomed’ and ‘united’.

Many of these responses indicated a flattening out of difference. Shared history was an opportunity to resolve cultural difference and unify. Some respondents spoke about Indigenous and non-Indigenous people as two disparate cultures who had failed to reconcile their differences, as the Advisory Committee member intimated when she expressed a desire to move beyond an ‘us and them’ cultural dynamic. One of the local school teachers also drew attention to this when he spoke about different approaches to the landscape; ‘certain plants are women’s business and certain plants are men’s business and neither can get together. And we just think in our back yard; “that’s great, here’s a yam!”’. We get our tensions, our different perspectives’.<sup>534</sup> In attempting to grapple with the notion of ‘shared history’ some of my non-Indigenous participants imagined that difference, experienced as a tension, could be countered by ‘explor[ing] issues together’. This was perhaps an attempt to smooth and untangle the knot of Aboriginal and settler pasts, because as the Advisory Committee member admitted; ‘part of me feels like it is still done in white man’s terms’.<sup>535</sup>

The concept of ‘shared history’ has been critiqued by some historians who variously argued that in attempting to produce a singular national narrative that can be ‘shared’ by Aboriginal and settler people, historians are evading the complexities and ambiguities of the settler and Aboriginal past and of the process of history-making. In the context of national history-making projects like the Australian Reconciliation Council’s ‘shared histories’ initiative,

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<sup>534</sup> Non-Aboriginal/local teacher, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 13, 2015, transcript NAP12.

<sup>535</sup> Non-Aboriginal/Bundian Way Advisory Committee member, interview with Jodie Stewart, October 27, 2015, transcript NAP4.

Heather Goodall argued that history should not be seen as a collection of stories but as a *process*. For her, open-ended stories that create opportunities for cross-cultural collaborations and shared tasks should be an important goal of genuine reconciliation.<sup>536</sup> Bain Attwood drew a distinction between ‘shared history’ and ‘sharing history’ suggesting that the latter enables the recognition and acceptance of ongoing difference as well as a better understanding of contradiction and conflict.<sup>537</sup> Where ‘shared history’ reflects history as a collection of closed-off stories, ‘sharing histories’ acknowledges different historical perspectives and interpretations. ‘Sharing histories’ highlights diversity and a state of ongoing pluralism.<sup>538</sup> Ian Niven and Lynette Russell have also similarly drawn attention to complexity and difference, arguing that the concept of ‘shared history’ assumes that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people share the same experience of settler colonisation.<sup>539</sup>

History lay at the heart of past and contemporary efforts to ‘reconcile’ Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. As Penny Edmonds argued, (re)conciliation has a potent relationship with the past, from which it cannot be unmoored.<sup>540</sup> The project of reconciliation in Australia is underpinned by a ‘linear push’ to move forward and the desire to create a unified nation.<sup>541</sup>

The history of the reconciliation movement in Australia indicates that practical attempts to

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<sup>536</sup> Heather Goodall, ‘Too early or not soon enough? Reflections on sharing histories as process’, *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no.118 (2002): 17

<sup>537</sup> Bain Attwood, ‘Unsettling pasts: reconciliation and history in settler Australia’, *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no.3 (2005):248-49.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> Ian Niven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous people and Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Lanham: Altmira Press, 2005), 215.

<sup>540</sup> Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and Reconciliation*, 10.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 9.

address the original seizure of land and the dispossession of Indigenous people was replaced by a reconciliation process that emphasised educational outcomes and raising awareness. Sociologist Damien Short argued that official Reconciliation exhibits a subtle assimilationist agenda and should be understood as the latest phase in the colonial project.<sup>542</sup> Historian of Aboriginal history, Miranda Johnson also argued that state-based reconciliation is not about Aboriginal sovereignty or Indigenous rights but is instead an attempt to re-entrench settler belonging through affective attachment to national renewal.<sup>543</sup>

Attwood argued that words like ‘reconciliation’ and ‘consensus’ be replaced with ‘accommodation’ and ‘compromise’. The latter terms serve to recognise and legitimise the existence of conflicting values and interests.<sup>544</sup> The ways that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people interacted, conflicted and became entangled is present in the archives and the histories that settler and Aboriginal people tell, and it is also present in the landscape. Through the Bundian Way project, Indigenous Elders and activists are attempting to revitalise a pathway that for Indigenous people as a living archive. As Les Kosez suggested, it ‘is a physical manifestation of the cultural practices in traditional times’.<sup>545</sup> Drawing on this material archive, they are telling stories and histories that foreground Indigenous sovereignty and a deep Aboriginal past. They are also telling more honest histories of settler colonisation. This archive is often not apparent to non-Indigenous people. My non-Indigenous respondents demonstrated a guilt-ridden and tense relationship with this pathway and its history. When

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<sup>542</sup> Damien Short, ‘Australian “Aboriginal Reconciliation: The Latest Phase in the Colonial Project”, *Citizenship Studies* vol.7, No.3 (2003): 291- 312.

<sup>543</sup> Miranda Johnson cited in Penny Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and Reconciliation*, 18.

<sup>544</sup> Attwood, ‘Unsettling pasts: reconciliation and history in settler Australia’, 255-256.

<sup>545</sup> Les, Kosez, interview with Jodie Stewart, January 7, 2016, transcript, AEM5.



Indigenous Elders and activists share histories and stories with non-Indigenous people, it often comes at the cost of having to navigate and appease settler emotions. The non-Indigenous flattening out of difference indicates that for many of my respondents they are not ready, or willing, to engage with the tensions that ‘living in difference’ produces. This may include having to relinquish power and to sit with the tension, which for some non-Indigenous people is impossible to negotiate.<sup>546</sup>

Aboriginal Elders and activists are utilising the project in an attempt to generate new and divergent understandings of place but also of how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people came to occupy and ‘share’ the same places. This ‘sharing’ is underscored by an act of Aboriginal generosity and goodwill that has been historically exploited and trivialised, and enabled early Europeans like Ben Boyd to expand their pastoral holdings and their wealth. Indigenous conceptions of sharing are based on Indigenous sovereignty that highlights cultural difference. Reconciliation practices that collapse this difference are potentially delimiting to the ongoing project of decolonising settler colonial Australia. As Edmonds explained, settler colonisation’s staged deployment of reconciliation acts to marshal diverse actors towards an historic exchange that will dissolve the problematic relations of colonisation.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Lisa Slater also talks about this feeling of discomfort. See Lisa Slater, ‘Mediation on Discomfort’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 32, no.93 (2017): 335-343.

<sup>547</sup> Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and Reconciliation*, 16.

## 7.5 Conclusion

For Aboriginal Elders and activists engaged with the project, the notion of ‘shared history’ is based on a definition of Aboriginal culture that is resilient and enduring. It incorporates a process of sharing that can open new conversations about the local places that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people share. There is an attempt to generate a conversation about different ways to belong and how to build productive, more ethical connections to people and place. Aboriginal Elders and activists, people like BJ and Ossie Cruse, hope to demonstrate the endurance of Aboriginal sovereignty within contemporary Australia by drawing attention to those parts of culture that cannot be erased or written over by settler colonisation. This includes enduring connections to land and kin and the continuation of cultural practices and Indigenous belief systems that sustain and build Aboriginal communities. The project foregrounds histories where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people came to inhabit the same places and utilise the same resources. These histories are complex ones that foreground the ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives have become intertwined. They include painful stories of violence, dispossession and death, stories that non-Indigenous people can choose not to attend to, alongside stories of hope and cross-cultural collaboration and friendship.

For non-Aboriginal people, the Bundian Way project offers the opportunity to engage with Aboriginal people and to better understand the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations on the far south coast. Yet, their understanding of ‘shared history’ as a process of coming together and ameliorating differences has delimited their ability to confront their own guilt and anxieties. What knowledge is shared and how it is disseminated is an important part of the process of history-making that is unfolding through the project. Aboriginal Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project are aware of the fragile nature of Aboriginal

and settler relations and how particular historical narratives can elicit responses from some non-Indigenous people that can range from hostile to apathetic. For Indigenous people, what happens when telling settler peoples ‘what their ancestors done’ increases racism, rather than produces greater understanding? What are the costs to Indigenous people when they tell their stories and share their experiences of colonisation with settler peoples? For Indigenous people, addressing these questions requires them to navigate a tide of settler emotions that often rises-up and threatens to wash away Indigenous attempts to reimagine the nation’s settler and Aboriginal past.



Figure 7.3: *View from the 'Whale Dreaming Trail', Eden NSW.*

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated some of the ways that a small group of non-Indigenous people responded to a process of history-making initiated by local Aboriginal Elders and activists on the far south coast of New South Wales. I began by ruminating on my own family history, a history, that through discussions with Ossie Cruse, I found was entangled with the Indigenous community. Prior to my research this was a history that I had largely forgotten. I had come to know and unknow the Aboriginal past in the place I called home through the rhythms of my suburban family, growing up in the Bega Valley in the 1980s and 1990s, and through fragments of memory. This was a process of remembering and forgetting that has been commonly performed by non-Indigenous people on the far south coast, and the nation more broadly as Chris Healy has argued.<sup>548</sup> My own family history and how I came to know Aboriginal pasts in this place, prompted me to question how people like me, white progressive Australians of goodwill, came to know settler and Aboriginal pasts in settler colonial Australia.

Over the course of my research, I listened to what Elders and activists told me about the Bundian Way project and I observed the ways these individuals and community leaders navigated the challenges of developing and planning a large-scale infrastructure project. For them, a significant part of the process of creating this ‘shared history’ project was the need to contest and challenge enduring cultural stereotypes that positioned Indigenous people as existing outside of time, and outside of history. BJ Cruse often reiterated to me and to others that Indigenous people on the far south coast were contemporary people and not a people that

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<sup>548</sup> Chris, Healy, *Forgetting Aborigines* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008).

did not exist anymore.<sup>549</sup> The positioning of Indigenous people on the far south coast as a ‘history-less people’ had rendered them outliers in their local area, an area that they have made, and continue to make, significant contributions to.<sup>550</sup> Yet, what happens when these ‘history-less people’ attempt to make and maintain histories that counter dominant settler colonial assumptions? What are the impacts of this rupturing of time and space? More specifically, what are the impacts on the people who have benefited the most from the perpetuation of these cultural and historically contingent stereotypes?

These are some of the questions that I have attempted to address in this thesis. Chapter 3 commenced my thinking on how non-Indigenous people come to know Indigenous pasts by exploring what five non-Indigenous people told me about their historical understandings of a place that they loved. This was a place they had been regularly returning to and was also a significant Indigenous place along the Bundian Way, a place they called Fisheries but which Indigenous people are teaching us to call Bilgalera. This chapter asked how non-Indigenous people come to know Aboriginal pasts when Indigenous histories are not their central frame of reference. I interviewed five non-Indigenous campers who had been returning to Fisheries to camp, some for several decades. I proposed that the practices that occurred within this place by non-Indigenous campers produced particular understandings of it. For these non-Indigenous campers, Fisheries was a place of leisure and recreation and somewhere you

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<sup>549</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>550</sup> Jeanine Leane, ‘History-less People’ in *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place*, eds. Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb. ANU E Press, 2015. Lorenzo Veracini also writes about Indigenous people being positioned as not having a history stating that ‘it is a people without a history in a place without a history, a recurring trait in most settler colonial formations’, see Lorenzo Veracini, ‘Settler Collective, Founding Violence and Disavowal: The Settler Colonial Situation’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no.4 (2008): 367.

could escape from ‘mainstream life’, as one of the campers put it.<sup>551</sup> The Aboriginal history of this place did not inform how they conducted themselves within this space nor how they invested it with meaning. Fisheries was closed by the Eden LALC in 2011, causing much anger and consternation among some non-Indigenous people who used to camp there. This backlash, and the understandings of place communicated to me by the five non-Indigenous campers, is significant because the Eden LALC hope to re-open Fisheries to camping and communicate the deep Aboriginal past embedded there. Fisheries will once more become Bilgalera. In 2014, when I commenced my research, Indigenous Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project were undertaking a form of historical practice that would challenge some non-Indigenous people on the far south coast to think differently about settler and Aboriginal pasts.

In Chapter 4, I explored the history-work of young Aboriginal men employed to build the pathways physical infrastructure. These young men were drawing on what Reinhart Koselleck calls the ‘space of experience’ to reconceptualise dominant settler histories of cross-cultural encounter that had positioned them as the primitive ‘other’.<sup>552</sup> By drawing out the qualities and strengths that they saw in themselves, in others and in their community, these men were reimagining the colonial interface as a space of Indigenous generosity, strength and resilience. Their history-making privileged present concerns and future considerations, of how to live well in the present in the face of the enduring racism and racist settler practices they spoke to me about. I read this past, following Hayden White as a

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<sup>551</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>552</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Translated by Keith Tribe. MIT Press, 1985.

‘practical past’ that enabled the young men to envisage better lives for themselves and for their community.

Chapter 5 drew on the insights of Elder Aileen Blackburn who declared that Aboriginal women working on the Aboriginal Women and Yams Fields project (AWAY) were reclaiming their Indigenous sovereignty via a process of history through doing. Aileen Blackburn drew out for me the gendered implications of Indigenous women’s lives under settler colonisation but also the possibilities for young women to reclaim a sense of belonging that is tied to being in and caring for country. I considered bodily practices enacted in culturally and socially significant places that enabled these women to reaffirm their sovereign identity as vital contributors to Indigenous social and cultural life. Their sovereign identity and position as vital contributors have often been denied to them since the onset of settler colonisation. Following Native American scholars Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill I argued that this denial is a product of heteropatriarchy—a dominant social system that privileges heterosexuality and patriarchy.<sup>553</sup> The women’s history-work is a way of countering the oppressions that the fusion of settler colonisation and heteropatriarchy perpetuate.

In Chapter 6, I moved to discuss non-Indigenous responses to Indigenous history-making on the Bundian Way. I asked: what are the impacts of Indigenous histories that are articulated and performed by Elders and activists, people like Aileen Blackburn, and the young men and women who have worked on the project, on non-Indigenous people? I argued that the non-Indigenous people that I interviewed for this thesis utilised the paradigm of loss to help them think through the more honest histories that were being communicated through the Bundian

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<sup>553</sup> See Chapter 5.



Way project. The paradigm of loss was informed by their prior knowledge of Indigenous people and histories but also their subjectivity; their identity as ‘good white people’ who feel deeply for Indigenous people and the challenges they face under settler colonisation. I also drew on BJ Cruse’s notion of care to consider how non-Indigenous people might think ethically about Aboriginal pasts. In 2016 BJ Cruse stated that in order for the nation to recognise Indigenous people they also needed to care about them. While many of the non-Indigenous people I interviewed for this thesis indicated care and concern for Indigenous people, some were also beginning to think with care, which Lisa Slater suggests can enable non-indigenous allies to relate differently by taking a deeper interest in another’s world.<sup>554</sup>

I considered the concept of ‘shared history’ in Chapter 7, by exploring how the concept was communicated to me by Elders and activists, and non-Indigenous people. BJ Cruse and Les Kosez indicated to me that there are substantial risks for Indigenous people when they share their histories and culture with non-Indigenous people. These risks include the possibility of indifference and the withdrawal of support for this Indigenous-led cultural enterprise, even the risk of increased racism. I argued that the paradigm of reconciliation had informed non-Indigenous understandings of ‘shared history’. Within this paradigm, ‘shared history’ is viewed through the lens of equality and sameness which runs counter to Indigenous history-making that seeks to assert the fundamental difference of Indigenous sovereignty.

The words of Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project helped to guide my research and in particular my aim to undertake research that would contribute to the ongoing project of decolonisation. Challenging dominant western ways of knowing is a vital part of

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<sup>554</sup> Lisa Slater, ‘Questioning Care’, *The Pedagogies of Cultural Studies*, in Andrew Hickey ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 126.

this project and central to the activism of people like Ossie and BJ Cruse. Their paramount challenge to non-Indigenous researchers like me who undertake decolonising research, is to also interrogate western research practices, including the interrogation of one's own subjectivity. As a non-Indigenous researcher of good will researching other non-Indigenous people of good will, I understood that I would be studying my 'own tribe'.<sup>555</sup> I was guided by the methodological approaches of other non-Indigenous researchers who had conducted research on non-Indigenous people, 'good white people' in Lisa Slater's terms or 'white anti-racists' as Emma Koval called them.<sup>556</sup> These scholars provided ways for me to understand my own subject position, of being similarly positioned as my non-Indigenous research participants, and to interrogate my own subjectivity vis-à-vis the process of decolonising research.

In this thesis, I was obliged to position myself as part of the research rather than separate from it. In chapter 2, I addressed the ways I am a 'good white person' attempting to do 'good' by addressing my own complicity in the settler colonial project. Like my non-Indigenous respondents, I experienced similar feelings, of guilt, shame and loss, when confronted with more honest histories of Aboriginal and settler pasts on the far south coast, communicated by Indigenous people. Encounters with what Lisa Slater calls 'the density of Indigenous life' produced in me a crippling anxiety.<sup>557</sup> But I was also forced to stay with that anxiety, even though it was often uncomfortable, and unsettling. My many conversations in

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<sup>555</sup> Emma Koval, *Trapped in the gap: Doing Good in Indigenous Australia* (Berghahn Books, 2015).

<sup>556</sup> Koval, *Trapped in the Gap* and Lisa Slater, *Anxieties of Belonging in Settler Colonialism: Australia, Race and Place* (New York, Routledge, 2018).

<sup>557</sup> Lisa Slater, 'Anxious settler belonging: actualising the potential for making resilient postcolonial subjects', *M/C Journal* 16, no.5 (2013): i

the office of the LALC, of listening to Indigenous histories in culturally significant places, and my experience at the Bega AECG meeting that I discussed in Chapter 2, were instances when I had to confront and sit with my own whiteness.

A ‘radical oral history approach’ advocated by the late Minoru Hokari and ‘oral historiography’ proposed by Anna Clark, provided the methodological scaffolding for me to listen carefully and respectfully to what my research participants told me. It also provided ways for me to better understand the bodily and visceral responses of non-Indigenous people to Indigenous history-making, including my own. Clark’s ‘oral historiography’ that is a combination of oral history, focus group work and qualitative analysis, helped me to compose my interview questions and design my research methods which included face-to-face interviews, focus groups, surveys and ethnography. Like Clarke, I was interested in understanding *how* people know and utilise the past in the present rather than what they know about it. This required a research approach that would enable participants to reflect on their thought processes and enable them to try to tell me how they know. Hokari’s ‘radical oral history’ approach provided ways for me to think about my own positionality as a non-Indigenous historian and how to navigate the objective/subjective paradigm that he identified in order to listen better to Indigenous pasts.

My research showed that some non-Indigenous people who were part of this research were also starting to listen carefully to local Indigenous pasts. Elders and activists engaged with the project were inviting non-Indigenous people to walk their pathway and listen to their more honest telling of Indigenous experience under settler colonisation. The non-Indigenous people of goodwill, accepted this invitation and thought deeply about the words and experiences shared with them by Elders and activists. Over time, I trust that many more will

seek out this invitation, will choose to walk the pathway and hear Indigenous histories. But to what effect? What happens when settler engagement comes with the threat of walking away?

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In January 2018 I took-up a position as a journalist at the *Eden Magnet*, Eden's local newspaper. I was close to completing my PhD and it seemed like a good time to enter the work force and start earning money. I hoped that I could balance the demands of a full-time job and a PhD while remaining connected to the community of Eden. The Bundian Way project had been in the news since I commenced my PhD in 2014 and this new job was an opportunity to continue to research and write about the project. My first article on the Bundian Way appeared online and on the front page of their print edition. The article announced the commencement of work on stage one of the Whale Dreaming Trail.<sup>558</sup> This trail was significant because being close to the Eden Wharf, it represented an opportunity for the Indigenous community to capitalise on the burgeoning cruise ship market.<sup>559</sup>

When I interviewed project manager Noel Whittem about the Whale Dreaming trail in January 2018 he was buoyed by the pace of work on the trail but also dismayed at the precarious nature of funding for the remainder of the project. While funding for stage one of the Whale Dreaming Trail was in place, funding for stage two and three were less secure. This was an all too familiar predicament for the project manager and for activists and Elders working on and advocating for the Bundian Way project. In early May 2018, non-Indigenous

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<sup>558</sup> Jodie Stewart, 'Construction started on Bundian Way Whale Dreaming Trail', *Eden Magnet* May 23 2018, *Eden Magnet*, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/5177837/work-starts-on-whale-dreaming-trail/>

<sup>559</sup> It is approximately 600m from the wharf to the first viewing platform that was installed in 2018. The trail will be approximately 1.1km long when fully constructed.

historian and Bundian Way Advisory Committee member John Blay approached me via email and expressed his disappointment at local MPs who had consistently failed to support the Bundian Way project. The then Deputy Premier and minister for regional NSW's announcement that his government had allocated 27 million dollars from the Regional Growth and Environmental Tourism Fund to fund walking tracks in Kosciusko National Park had prompted John Blay to go public with his disappointment.

For Noel Whitem, the project's development was jeopardised by state and commonwealth government funding that was promised but never delivered. In May 2018, the Eden LALC was deemed ineligible for the Australian Government's Regional Jobs and Investment Package (RJIP). The RJIP was a 223-million-dollar pot of money set aside to assist ten targeted regional areas across the country, including the NSW far south coast, to diversify their economies and drive long-term economic growth and sustainable employment.<sup>560</sup> But it came with strings attached. For the Eden LALC to apply they needed to match the proposed commonwealth contribution. This was funds that the LALC did not have, according to Noel Whitem. But the rub for the project manager was not the LALC's empty coffers but the withdrawal of support from the state government, and in particular the rescinding of a 'verbal commitment' made by state member Andrew Constance:

Mr Constance promised that he would sort the NSW state government's funding contribution under the Regional Growth Environment and Tourism Fund (RGETF) and the NSW Cultural Fund. We were told at the 11th hour that the Eden LALC would need to contribute 50 per cent of the matching funding

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<sup>560</sup> See Australian Government, 'Regional Jobs and Investment Package', Australian Government: Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development, <https://www.regional.gov.au/regional/programs/regional-jobs-investment-package.aspx>

required under the RJIP, funds that the Eden LALC just didn't have. The particular condition under the RJIP guidelines was very unclear and ambiguous at best.<sup>561</sup>

Again, BJ Cruse drew my attention to the challenges that Indigenous people face when attempting to strengthen their communities in settler colonial Australia. Like the 'good white person' who threatened to withdraw their support when hearing more honest histories, representatives of the settler state could also withdraw theirs when confronted with a critical appraisal of the political process. When I spoke to BJ Cruse about Noel Whitem's and John Blay's responses, he expressed his reservations about publicly condemning MPs like Mr Constance. 'We need to be careful' he said.<sup>562</sup> BJ and Ossie Cruse had worked closely with politicians like Mike Kelly, John Barilaro and Andrew Constance, building relationships with them over time to ensure ongoing political support for the project. This support would be vital to ensuring the project's ongoing success. BJ Cruse indicated to me that for Indigenous people who are forced to engage with settler politics, the stakes are high. He counselled caution, indicating that political support can also be withdrawn. For him, building better lives for Indigenous people on the far south coast required the careful maintenance of good political relations.

The precarious nature of Indigenous and settler relations was a defining feature of my research. Indigenous Elders and activists spoke to me about the risks attached to communicating more honest histories of settler colonisation to non-Indigenous people, who could choose to walk away. Attempts to mitigate these risks is an ongoing part of the

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<sup>561</sup> Noel Whitem, quoted in Jodie Stewart, 'Bundian Way Project Reaches Crises Point', *Eden Magnet*, March 8 2018, *Eden Magnet* <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/5269246/bundian-way-project-reaches-crisis-point/>

<sup>562</sup> BJ Cruse, personal communication, May 1, 2018.

activism of people like BJ and Ossie Cruse and is an ongoing part of the work involved in planning and implementing the Bundian Way project. BJ Cruse's cautious approach is informed by years of delicate negotiations with the settler state and also settler peoples. Non-Indigenous people who I interviewed for this thesis, also expressed caution, but it was caution of a different kind. Some of my non-Indigenous respondents said that they were forced to exercise caution when engaging with Indigenous people because they feared that Indigenous people would 'shut the door' and exclude them from their epistemological worlds.<sup>563</sup> Many of my non-Indigenous respondents sought out Indigenous local knowledge that they assumed was denied to them by Indigenous people. Many expressed a sense of discomfort, of 'walking on glass' or 'eggshells' that created barriers to meaningful engagement.<sup>564</sup> Some even chose not to engage at all. One non-Indigenous tertiary student who attended the Bundian Way cultural tour in October 2015, told me several years later that she had been considering researching local Indigenous history for her honours' year, but decided against it. 'It is just too hard', she said.<sup>565</sup>

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In May 2017 at Uluru the nation's heart, 250 Indigenous delegates attending the 2017 First Nations National Constitutional Convention issued a statement to the nation asking all Australians to come together and work toward structural and substantial constitutional reform for Indigenous Australians.<sup>566</sup> Pastor and Elder Ossie Cruse was a member of the delegation

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<sup>563</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>564</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>565</sup> UOW student, personal communication, May 9, 2017.

<sup>566</sup> 'The Uluru Statement from The heart', [https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru\\_Statement\\_From\\_The\\_Heart\\_0.PDF](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF)

that met on the lands of the Anangu people in late May. Upon his return he spoke to the Fairfax press in Bega stating that the Uluru Statement from the Heart was about ‘mother earth’:

It is about the fact that Aboriginal sovereignty differs from the Anglo-European sovereignty because it is connected to our responsibility to mother earth. Spiritually we are connected to the earth therefore those sovereign rights could never be ceded, never be lost.<sup>567</sup>

Meaningful constitutional reform would mean ‘joint sovereignty’ and a ‘real Australian constitution’ Ossie Cruse said. ‘Those things will come from the fact that we live on this earth together, we own this earth together’.<sup>568</sup> Ossie Cruse’s statements are spoken in the spirit of togetherness, he looks to the prospect of a nation coming together to make change happen. ‘I can see that Australia wants this and I think people power will make that happen’.<sup>569</sup> For Ossie Cruse and many others, this was not the moment for settler Australia to turn and walk away.

In October 2017, however, the then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull repudiated the request for a ‘voice’ to the Australia parliament by suggesting that it would represent a ‘third

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<sup>567</sup> Ossie Cruse, Bega District News Facebook Page, posted July 7, 2017 <https://www.facebook.com/BegaNews/videos/1770543696306070/>

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ossie Cruse, quoted in Zac Hubber, ‘Uluru Statement of the Heart tremendous starting point, Uncle Ossie says’, *Eden Magnet*, June 7, 2017, <https://www.edenmagnet.com.au/story/4713970/heart-hope-replaces-symbolism/>



chamber of parliament'.<sup>570</sup> The government was also silent on the proposal for a Makarrata<sup>571</sup> to oversee truth-telling and treaty-making. The Turnbull government chose to turn and walk away. Turning their back on Indigenous Australia in this moment also meant turning away from several thousands of years of human history on the continent, and over two hundred years of Indigenous experience under settler colonisation. This denial of Aboriginal pasts was not confined to the political sphere. Mark McKenna suggested that there were specific reasons for this national disavowal. Citing anthropologist WEH Stanner and Yawuru man Senator Patrick Dodson, he claimed that the nation is resistant to confronting 'a profound historical truth'. 'It's precisely this recognition—that the material success of Australian society was built upon the dispossession of Indigenous Australia, a history that clearly demands treaty and settlement—that causes so many to avert their eyes'.<sup>572</sup>

Writing for the *Griffith Review* Wannyi Jaru man Gregory Phillips suggested that like many settler Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 'sick of' the past as well. Moreover, he argued that peaceful coexistence within the nation is impossible 'if we do not know its story'.<sup>573</sup> In considering what 'truth-telling' might look like as part of the proposed Makarrata commission, constitutional lawyers, Cobble Cobble woman Megan Davis and

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<sup>570</sup> Media Release, 'Response to Referendum Council's report on Constitutional Recognition', Malcolm Turnbull: 29<sup>th</sup> Prime Minister of Australia 2015-2018, <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/response-to-referendum-councils-report-on-constitutional-recognition>

<sup>571</sup> Indigenous activist and commentator Luke Pearson states that Makarrata is 'a complex Yolngu word describing a process of conflict resolution, peacemaking and justice'. See Luke Pearson, 'What is a Makarata? The Yolngu word is more than a synonym for treaty', *ABC News*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-10/makarrata-explainer-yolngu-word-more-than-synonym-for-treaty/8790452>

<sup>572</sup> Mark McKenna, 'Moment of Truth: History and Australia's Future', *Quarterly Essay*, 69 (2018): 17-16.

<sup>573</sup> Gregory Phillips, 'No Republic without a Soul: Exorcising the ghosts of Colonisation', *Griffith Review* 60 (2018): 101.

Gabrielle Appleby argued that ‘truth-telling must come from local communities, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples working with non-Aboriginal people in that community’.<sup>574</sup> Citing Penelope Edmonds they argued for the importance of these local initiatives and suggested that many people are suspicious of reconciliation efforts that are led by local government.<sup>575</sup>

This thesis has attempted to document a process of localised truth-telling that is occurring on the far south coast by exploring the responses of non-Indigenous people to the history-work of Indigenous Elders and activists engaged with the project. Elders and activists engaged with the Bundian Way project have been communicating Indigenous histories of place in the hope of generating better and more productive cross-cultural relations as well as to ‘invent alternative futures’ for themselves and their community.<sup>576</sup> Their more honest histories of the colonial interface foreground Indigenous qualities and strengths. They speak of a people who are sovereign and assured. This is a form of Indigenous history-making that is performed in the spirit of sharing which is an intrinsic part of Indigenous social and cultural life on the far south coast. Some non-Indigenous people are choosing not to walk away from Indigenous people, but to walk with them and to listen and attempt to learn more of our entangled pasts.

That these non-Indigenous people are choosing to engage ethically with Aboriginal and settler pasts was made possible by the generosity of Aboriginal people. The reiteration of Indigenous conceptions of sharing that embody ideas of sovereign difference-of deep

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<sup>574</sup> Gabrielle Appleby and Megan Davis, ‘The Uluru Statement and the Promise of Truth’, *Australian Historical Studies* 49, no.4 (2018): 508.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 508.

<sup>576</sup> Dennis Byrne, ‘Difference’, in *The Archaeology of the Contemporary World*, eds. Paul Graves-Brown, Rodney Harrison and Angela Piccini (Oxford University Press, 2013), 302.

Indigenous connections to place and a sovereignty never ceded—are working to bring some non-Indigenous people closer to a recognition of Indigenous sovereignty. Many of the non-Indigenous people that I interviewed were starting to consider the history of places through the prism of deep time which includes Indigenous pasts that are continuous and contemporary.<sup>577</sup> I found that the ways in which Indigenous people communicate their histories was also profoundly impactful, with some non-Indigenous participants indicating that face-to-face interactions with Indigenous people ‘who came and shared’ was transformative.<sup>578</sup>

Non-Indigenous people have a significant role to play within localised truth-telling projects like the Bundian Way. The onus of responsibility should not fall on the shoulders of Indigenous people to reconcile our nation’s pasts. As Megan Davis said of the Uluru Statement, it is ‘an invitation to you: to alleviate the need for us to be the buyer and the seller in this transaction’.<sup>579</sup> My research was an attempt to document this transactional work. In the context of localised truth-telling projects, this research is significant in helping to better understand the many ways settler Australians, people like me, come to know Aboriginal and settler pasts in one particular place at a specific moment in time. Moreover, an examination of *how* we know can help to better understand how we can expand our ways of knowing. To expand our ways of knowing is to connect with another’s world, it is to think *with care*.<sup>580</sup> To

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<sup>577</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>578</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>579</sup> Megan Davis, ‘Moment of Truth: Correspondence’, *Quarterly Essay*, 70 (2018): 90

<sup>580</sup> Lisa Slater, ‘Questioning Care’, in *The Pedagogies of Cultural Studies*, ed. Andrew Hickey (New York: Routledge, 2016), 126.

think with care is to utilise pasts that are our inheritance in more nuanced and ethical ways. It is no longer about what we can know, but what we should and can do.<sup>581</sup>

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After several months of writing in indoors, in late June 2019, I decided to pack-up my laptop and head to the coast. As I sat at Merimbula's Short Point headland, my attention was drawn away from my computer screen, and my PhD deadline. Whales had been sighted by a gaggle of excited tourists whose exaggerated pointing and clicking cameras attracted me to stare out to sea. Over the winter months, whales make their annual migration north to the warmer waters of Queensland.<sup>582</sup> In the depths of a far south coast winter, you can stand on one of the far south coasts many rugged headlands and watch as whales break the ocean's surface and make their slow migratory dance up the east coast. On that clear day at Short Point, my writing was punctuated by the spectacle of migrating whales, Short Point's expanse of sea had been transformed into a 'humpback highway'.

As I stood beside the excited tourists, I remembered a story Ossie Cruse told me many years before. I headed back to my computer and looked through my interview notes. It was the story of the whale ceremony that he had told me during an interview in 2015:

The Aboriginal people would join in [the whale ceremony] ceremony. In preparation for this ceremony there would be several tribes, some from Omeo some from Wiradjuri and on the tablelands the Ngarigo

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<sup>581</sup> Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Northwestern University Press, 2014), 9-10.

<sup>582</sup> Whales migrant annually along the east coast, heading north to Queensland from late April to August to mate and give birth and returning south to Antarctica from September through to November. See 'Whale Watching in NSW', Office of Environment and Heritage: NSW.

people and even north as far as Wandandian in Queanbeyan [...] would come down for these special ceremonies. So, then the ceremonies would take place.<sup>583</sup>

After drawing my attention to the importance of the whale ceremony for Indigenous people, Ossie Cruse continued his story:

Now what they did with the whale meat was that they used to dry it. Now dad and I used to do that with mutton fish during the Second World War. We used to dry the mutton fish on the rocks. We would have a bucket and we would take the mutton fish [abalone] out of the shell and throw them in the bucket for a couple of minutes till all the black went off them, then they would be really gold, golden and we would sit them in the sun and keep turning them in the sun until they dried out, then we would sell them to China. We started this abalone industry off, way back then in the 40s during the Second World War. So that is the way we used to preserve our whale food and they would carry that inland and trade it. It could last for days. When any food is dried out it will last for twelve months really, kept dried properly. The whale would be used totally; the whale bone would be used for spear tips and things.<sup>584</sup>

At the heart of Ossie Cruse's story is the continuation of Indigenous cultural practices that have sustained Indigenous people on the far south coast for several millennia. These practices have also supported European industries, which has often gone unacknowledged. As he said, 'we started the Abalone industry off'. Moreover, he highlighted the ingenuity of Aboriginal fishing practices that pre-dated European colonisation. Re-reading Ossie Cruse's story I was transported back and forth through time and space, between pre-invasion ceremonial practices, to Aboriginal industry during the Second World War and back. I was also

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<sup>583</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart, November 6, 2015, transcript AE2.

<sup>584</sup> Ossie Cruse, interview with Jodie Stewart.

reminded of Indigenous ingenuity, cultural strength and contribution that for Ossie Cruse, is embedded in deep time and is present-centred and contemporary.

This story of whales was not the story of a long-ago time where pre-invasion Indigenous lives were trapped in an immemorial past. In Ossie Cruse's telling, the recent past spent with his father curing abalone is continuous with the deep past and the present moment. I felt that collapsing of time in the place where I stood that day, at Short Point, and in the place I call home. It was present in the glimmering sea and in the whales that caused me to stop and feel wonder, exhilaration and a hope for recuperation. Ossie Cruse's story is a call to view Aboriginal pasts differently, as a continuity of time and place. His is an invitation to think with care about the places we inhabit and the histories that undergird them. Ossie Cruse's story is part of a process of Indigenous history-making that is continuing to unfold on the far south coast in places that are and always will be Aboriginal land.

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## Appendix 1: Research Approvals and Consent.



### APPROVAL LETTER

In reply please quote: HE14/476

5 February 2015

Ms Jodie Stewart  
30 Sapphire Cres  
Merimbula NSW, 2548

Dear Ms Stewart,

Thank you for your response dated 3 February 2015 to the HREC review of the application detailed below. I am pleased to advise that the application has been approved.

Ethics Number: HE14/476

Project Title: Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal Past on The Bundian Way

Researchers: Ms Jodie Stewart, Dr Georgine Clarsen

Approval Date: 5 February 2015

Expiry Date: 4 February 2016

The University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the *National Statement* and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

Approval by the HREC is for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date. Continuing approval requires:

- The submission of a progress report annually and on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/ethics/human/index.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the researchers and the appropriate Head of Unit, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.
- Approval by the HREC of any proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- Immediate report of serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- Immediate report of unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Ethics Unit, Research Services Office  
University of Wollongong NSW 2522 Australia  
Telephone (02) 4221 3386 Facsimile (02) 4221 4338  
Email: [rso-ethics@uow.edu.au](mailto:rso-ethics@uow.edu.au) Web: [www.uow.edu.au](http://www.uow.edu.au)

RENEWAL APPROVAL LETTER

Ethics Reference: HE14/476

10 February 2016

Ms Jodie Stewart  
30 Sapphire Cres  
Merimbula NSW, 2548

Dear Ms Stewart

I am pleased to advise that renewal of the following Human Research Ethics application has been approved. This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date.

Ethics Number:	HE14/476
Project Title:	Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal Past on The Bundian Way
Name of Researchers:	Ms Jodie Stewart, Dr Georgine Clarsen
Renewed From:	5 February 2016
Expiry Date:	4 February 2017

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. **Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.**

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate

Head of School and returned to the Research Services Office **prior to the expiry date.**

The University of Wollongong/ Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health Network District (ISLHD) Social Science HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit on phone 4221 3386 or email [rso-ethics@uow.edu.au](mailto:rso-ethics@uow.edu.au).

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APPROVAL after review  
In reply please quote: HE15/155  
Further Enquiries Phone: 4221 3386

10 July 2015

A/Professor Georgine Clarsen

Dear A/Professor Clarsen

Thank you for your letter responding to the HREC review letter. I am pleased to advise that the Human Research Ethics application referred to below has been **approved**.

Ethics Number:	HE15/155
Project Title:	Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal Past on the Bundian Way
Researchers:	A/Professor Georgine Clarsen, Miss Jodie Stewart
Approval Date:	8 July 2015
Study Expiry Date:	7 July 2016

The University of Wollongong/Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District Social Sciences HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. The HREC has reviewed the research proposal for compliance with the National Statement and approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with this document.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School, and returned to the Research Services Office prior to the expiry date.

As evidence of continuing compliance, the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit on phone 4221 3386 or email [rso-ethics@uow.edu.au](mailto:rso-ethics@uow.edu.au)

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UNIVERSITY  
OF WOLLONGONG  
AUSTRALIA

RENEWAL APPROVAL LETTER

Ethics Reference: HE15/155

26 July 2016

A/Professor Georgine Clarsen

Dear A/Professor Clarsen

I am pleased to advise that renewal of the following Human Research Ethics application has been approved. This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date.

Ethics Number:	HE15/155
Project Title:	Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal Past on the Bundian Way
Name of Researchers:	A/Professor Georgine Clarsen, Miss Jodie Stewart
Renewed From:	8 July 2016
Expiry Date:	7 July 2017

Please note that approvals are granted for a twelve month period. **Further extension will be considered on receipt of a progress report prior to expiry date.**

This certificate relates to the research protocol submitted in your original application and all approved amendments to date. Please remember that in addition to completing an annual report the Human Research Ethics Committee also requires that researchers immediately report:

- proposed changes to the protocol including changes to investigators involved
- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

A condition of approval by the HREC is the submission of a progress report annually and a final report on completion of your project. The progress report template is available at <http://www.uow.edu.au/research/rso/ethics/UOW009385.html>. This report must be completed, signed by the appropriate Head of School and returned to the Research Services Office **prior to the expiry date.**

The University of Wollongong/ Illawarra and Shoalhaven Local Health Network District (ISLHD) Social Science HREC is constituted and functions in accordance with the NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

If you have any queries regarding the HREC review process, please contact the Ethics Unit on phone 4221 3386 or email [rso-ethics@uow.edu.au](mailto:rso-ethics@uow.edu.au).

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Ms Jodie Stewart  
30 Sapphire Crescent  
MERIMBULA NSW 2548

CORP15/16483  
DOC15/514913  
SERAP 2015178

Dear Ms Stewart

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled *Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal Past on the Bundian Way*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. **You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to principals.**

This approval will remain valid until 07-Jul-2016.

As this research does not involve face-to-face contact with children, no researchers or research assistants have been screened to interact with or observe children.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- The privacy of participants is to be protected as per the NSW Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.
- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.
- All conditions attached to the approval must be complied with.

When your study is completed please email your report to: [serap@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:serap@det.nsw.edu.au)  
You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Harriman  
Leader, Quality Assurance  
3 August 2015



Policy, Planning and Reporting Directorate  
NSW Department of Education  
Level 1, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300  
Telephone: 02 9244 5060 – Email: [serap@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:serap@det.nsw.edu.au)

Ms Jodie Stewart  
30 Sapphire Crescent  
MERIMBULA NSW 2548

DOC16/785505  
SERAP 2015178

Dear Ms Stewart

I refer to your application for extension to the research project entitled *Pathways into History: Experiencing the Contemporary Aboriginal Past on the Bundian Way*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved.

This approval will remain valid until 07-Jul-2017.

As this research does not involve face-to-face contact with children, no researchers or research assistants have been screened to interact with or observe children.

When your study is completed please email your report to [serap@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:serap@det.nsw.edu.au).

Yours sincerely

Dr Robert Stevens  
Manager, Research  
11 August 2016



School Policy and Information Management  
NSW Department of Education  
Level 1, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300  
Telephone: 02 9244 6060 – Email: [serap@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:serap@det.nsw.edu.au)



## Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council

M.B.G. Keeping Place  
Jigarny Farm

Ph: 02 - 6495 7177  
Fax: 02 - 6495 7433

Email: [edenlalc@bigpond.com](mailto:edenlalc@bigpond.com)  
PO Box 199  
Eden NSW 2551

Jodie Stewart  
PhD Candidate  
University of Wollongong  
176 Auckland St  
Bega NSW 2551  
Email: [jls564@uowmail.edu.au](mailto:jls564@uowmail.edu.au)  
Mob: 0488 079 853

**Re: Letter of Consent – Pathways into History: experiencing the Aboriginal past on the Bundian Way**

The Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) is writing in regards to your planned research into how people experience the Aboriginal past and contemporary Aboriginal culture through participation in the Bundian Way project and via walking the trail. Particularly the experiences and involvement of various community members including: Aboriginal Elders, local people, school children, Aboriginal inmates and tourists.

The Eden LALC provides consent for you to undertake this research as outlined within your proposal, as the Bundian Way is a project of the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council. Consent is given with the understanding that information collected will be used in informing your PhD thesis and during the investigative process you will require access to members of the Eden LALC.

The Eden LALC will assist you during your research where ever it can, request for assistance will be assessed on a needs basis.

The Eden Local Aboriginal land Council welcomes and thanks you for your interest and expertise in relation to your intended research. Eden LALC acknowledges the worthiness of this investigation and beneficial information that may be gained through this research.

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Consent is given in good faith in regards to information collection and dissemination and acknowledges your indication that personal and cultural intellectual property, including names, will not be used without expressed consent from the individuals and/ or the Eden LALC, whichever is most relevant.

The Eden LALC wishes to provide you a lead contact in relation to your research to assist you efficiency in dealing with any matters that may arise during the course of your research. The Lead Contact will be:

Les Kosez  
Land and Sea Country Coordinator  
Ph: 02 6495 7177  
Email: [edenlalcprojects@bigpond.com](mailto:edenlalcprojects@bigpond.com)

Should this correspondence require any further clarification please do not hesitate to contact myself and/ or your designated lead contact with the Eden LALC.

Kind regards

Penny Stewart  
Chief Executive Officer  
Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council

25 September 2014

## **Appendix 2: Interview, Focus Groups and Survey Questions**

### Questions for non-Indigenous participants (interviews and focus groups)

- 1) Why did you choose to walk the pathway/participate in this project?
- 2) What did you expect to come out of this experience?
- 3) Can you tell me a little bit about the Bundian way and its history?
- 4) Did you know much about this history before you walked the path/participated in the project? What did you know or were you told about the history of the Bundian Way?  
Follow up if appropriate with: Why do you think you weren't told or didn't know?
- 5) How did you find out about this history?
- 6) Do you see yourself as part of the history of the Bundian Way? Can you tell me why?  
Or why not?
- 7) Did any aspects of the 'story' of the Bundian Way especially resonate with you?  
Why? Why not?
- 8) What did you see, feel, smell when you were walking the track?
- 9) What parts of the pathway/walk do you remember? What was special about this part/place/site?
- 10) As a 'shared history' pathway do you think the Bundian Way can be a mechanism for change? Please explain your answer.
- 11) (Local teachers) How would you incorporate the Bundian Way and its history into the curriculum?
- 12) (Artists) How have you incorporated the Bundian Way and its history into your creative practice?

### Questions for Indigenous participants

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with the Bundian Way project?
2. Is there an aspect of the project that has special significance to you?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of the Bundian Way?
4. How did the project come about?
5. Is there an aspect or part of this history that has special significance to you?
6. Can you tell me a little bit about the shared history aspects of the pathway?

7. I am interested in hearing about your experiences walking the pathway. Can you explain to me how you felt walking the path? How does this experience of walking make you feel? Is there a part(s) of the pathway you feel especially connected to and why? Do you feel differently when you return?
8. What is your vision for the Bundian Way project? What do you imagine the outcome of the project to be?
9. Is there anything you would like to add to help me to better understand the pathway and its history?

#### Survey Questions -cultural tours

1. Why did you choose to participate in this event?
2. How would you describe your experience participating in this event?
3. How would you describe your experience of walking the pathway (between Cocora and Quarantine)?
4. How would you describe your knowledge and understanding of local Aboriginal history and culture prior to the event?
5. How would you describe your knowledge and understanding of the shared history (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) of the local area prior to the event?
6. Please respond to the following questions.
  - Learning to how best connect and engage with local Aboriginal communities is important to me
  - Learning more about Aboriginal history and culture is important to me
  - Learning about the shared (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) history of my local area is important to me
7. Please respond to the following questions

- The event has inspired me to walk more of the pathway
  - I know feel differently about my local area
  - I want to participate in other Bundian Way events
8. Is there anything you would like to share about the Tour?

### Appendix 3: Facebook Posts



**Elaine Cozens** My great grandfather was guided by an Aboriginal man up the Bundian way to Delegate to marry my great grandmother..inthe mid 1800s.

Like · Reply · 5y



**The EDEN VOICE**

10 April 2018 · Edrom, NSW · 🌐

FISHERIES BEACH is private property belonging to the Eden local Aboriginal land council.

Firstly thank you the people who removed themselves voluntarily and respectfully when asked .

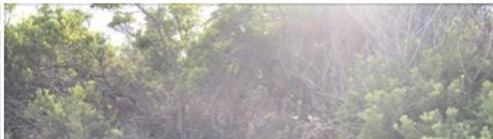
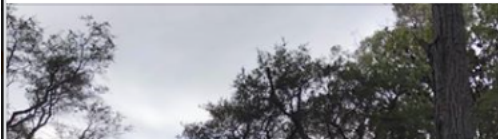
The property at fisheries beach is PRIVATE PROPERTY just like any other and is closed for various reasons.

The entrance gated, well posted to say it is private property and has had locks cut to gain entry numerous times, also people seem to think that they can make tracks and cut their way through surrounding bush land to gain entry.

So to LARGE group of DISRESPECTFUL PEOPLE trespassing over the recent Easter long weekend, who refused to go and obviously think that they have more rights to be there to party and so on. Disgustingly using the access trails and other areas as toilets and who left rubbish pilling up around the property. Also when asked to leave they just refuse saying " Your on a power trip " and " your so far up on your high horse"....

To my understanding PRIVATE PROPERTY IS PRIVATE PROPERTY, Thanks for being DISRESPECTFUL and having total DISREGARD for Eden land council property which is therefore DISRESPECTING the Local Eden Aboriginal Community.

It's people like you that are prolonging the process of the possibility of this land to be reopened .....





[REDACTED] I read this and it upset me, these are camp grounds where I have shared some of my fondest memories with friends and family! In saying that this land was taken from the locals, we knew know better than to pack up the swag and go to our favourite spot!

... [See more](#)

Like · 1y



[REDACTED] How about the land council put in some facilities and employ some local youths to look after it. Then charge people to camp there to pay for it, just like every other camp ground win win for everyone! Instead of just putting up a big gate?

Like · 1y



[REDACTED] And this is the reason we can't enjoy Fisheries anymore. We used to camp every Summer and Easter there until it was closed. Have been lucky enough once to go out for a night with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] since it's been locked for a memorial to a mate who used to camp there with us. We were always amazed at how much rubbish people left behind. One year we took our trailer out with our gear in it and brought it back to town completely filled (6x9 with cage) with rubbish including a couple of tv's. An expensive trip to the tip, but not something we minded doing as we only made a beautiful place to camp nicer for ourselves and others. Always left our area and others cleaner than we found it, but dickheads like this ruined and continue to ruin our chance of getting back to the best camping spot on the coast. Always happy to lend a hand to do a huge clean up out there if it's something worth considering.

Like · 1y

